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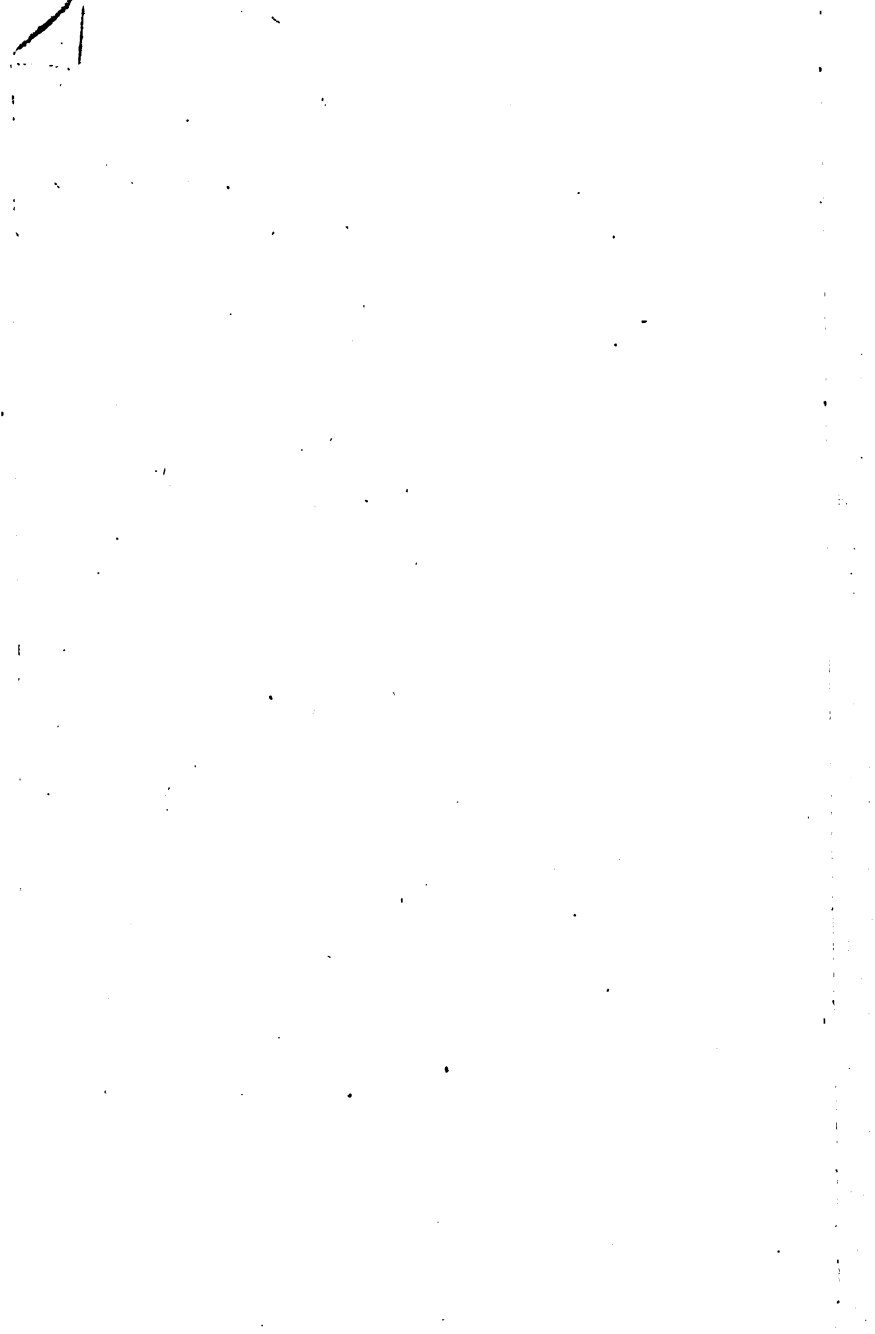
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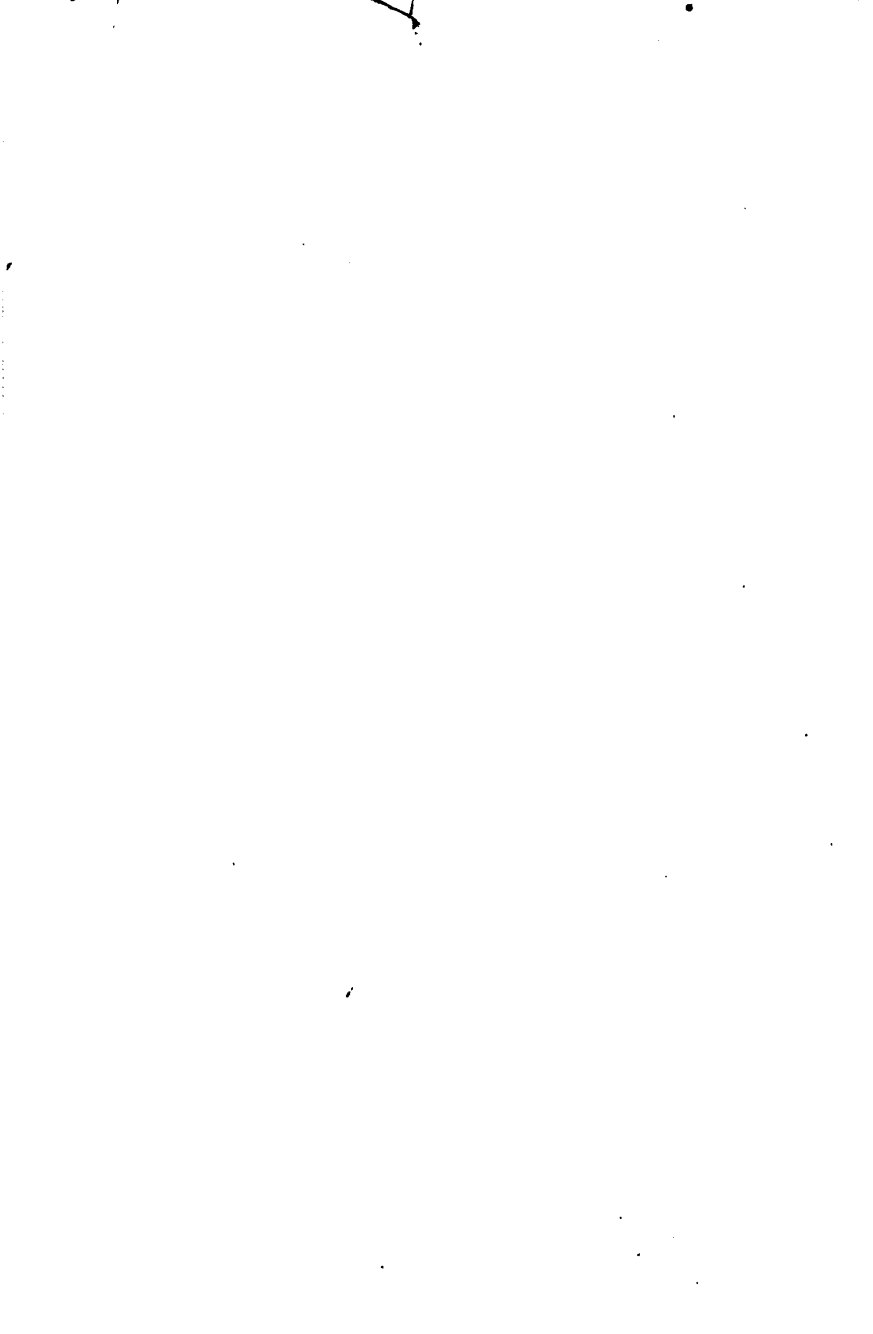
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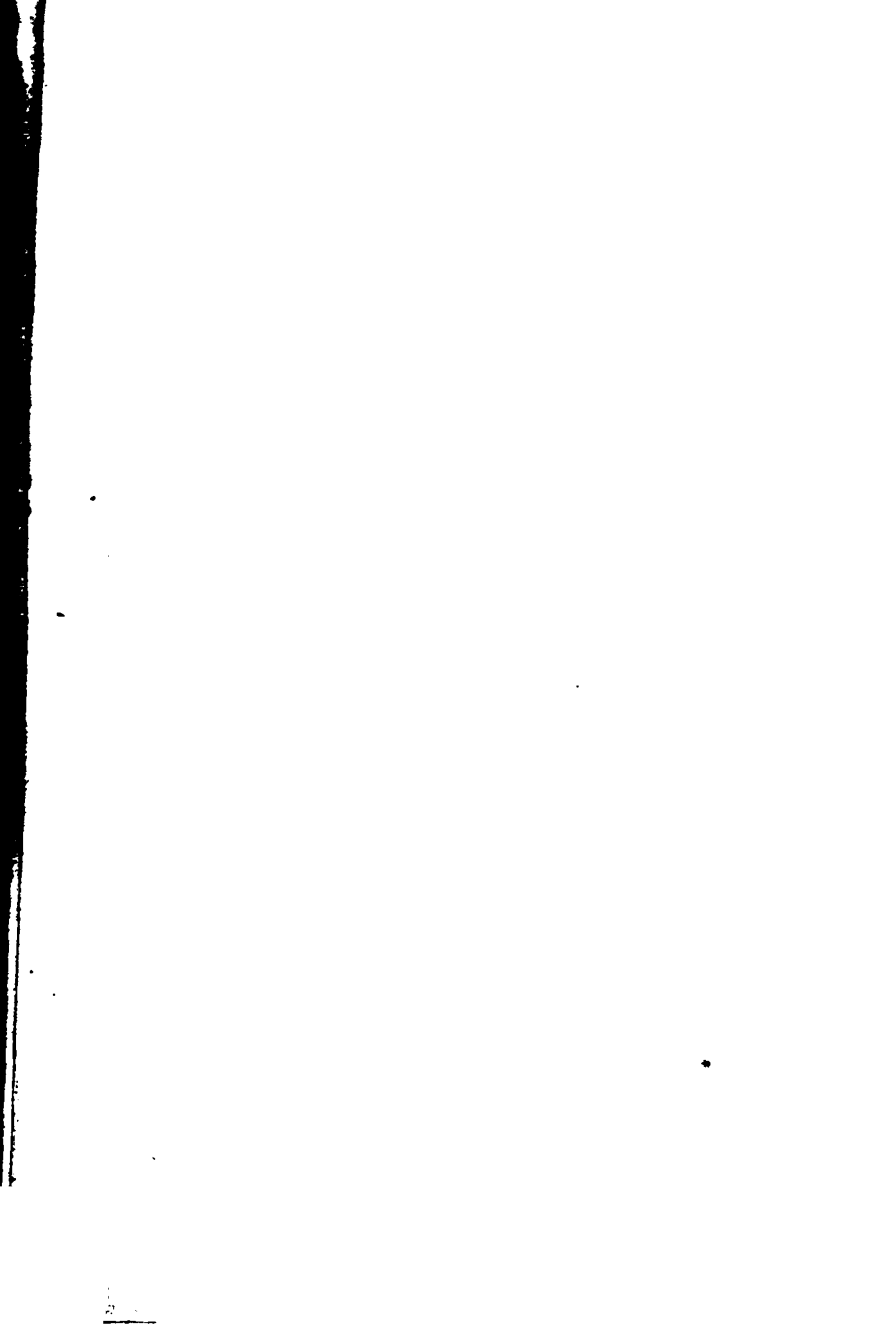


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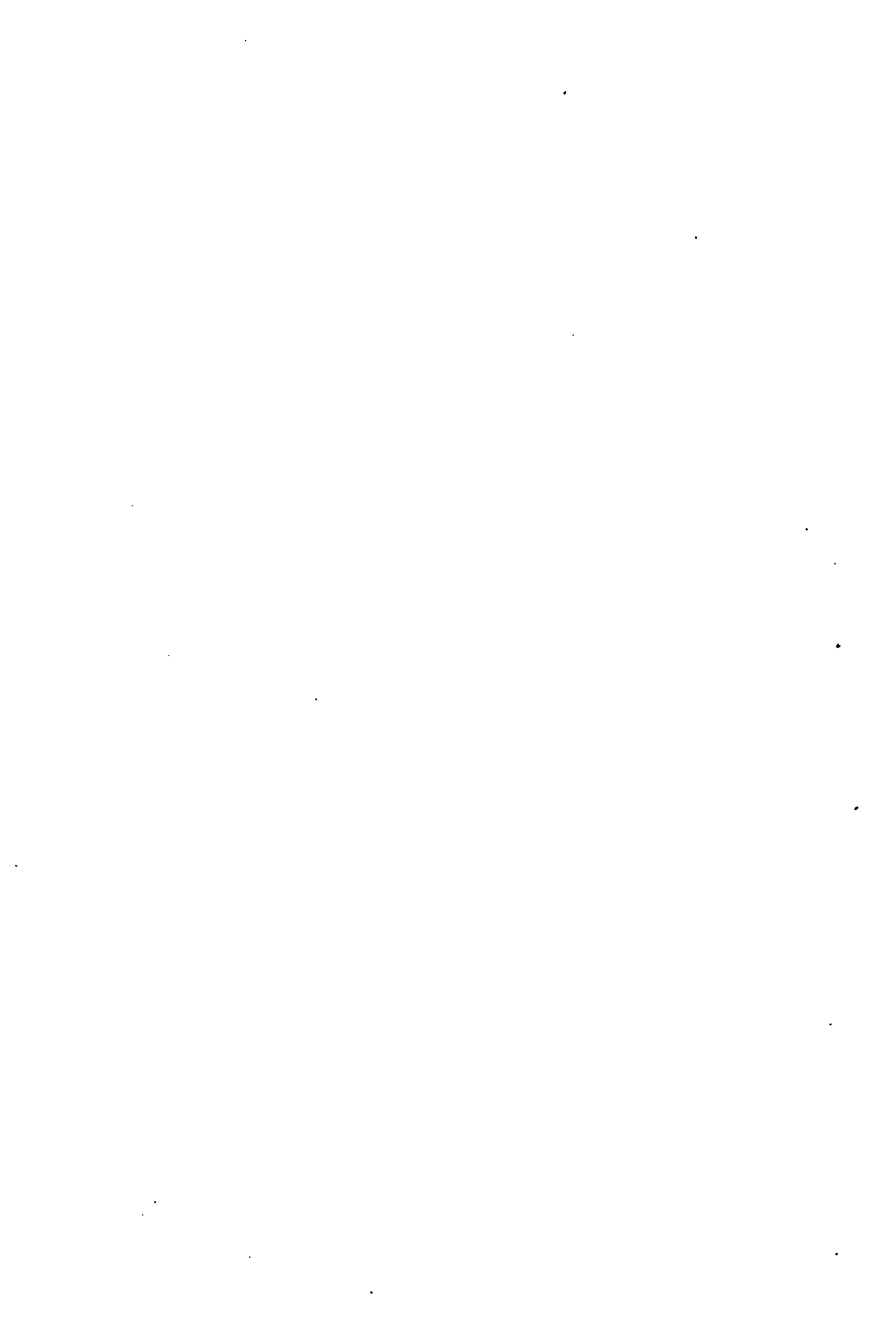
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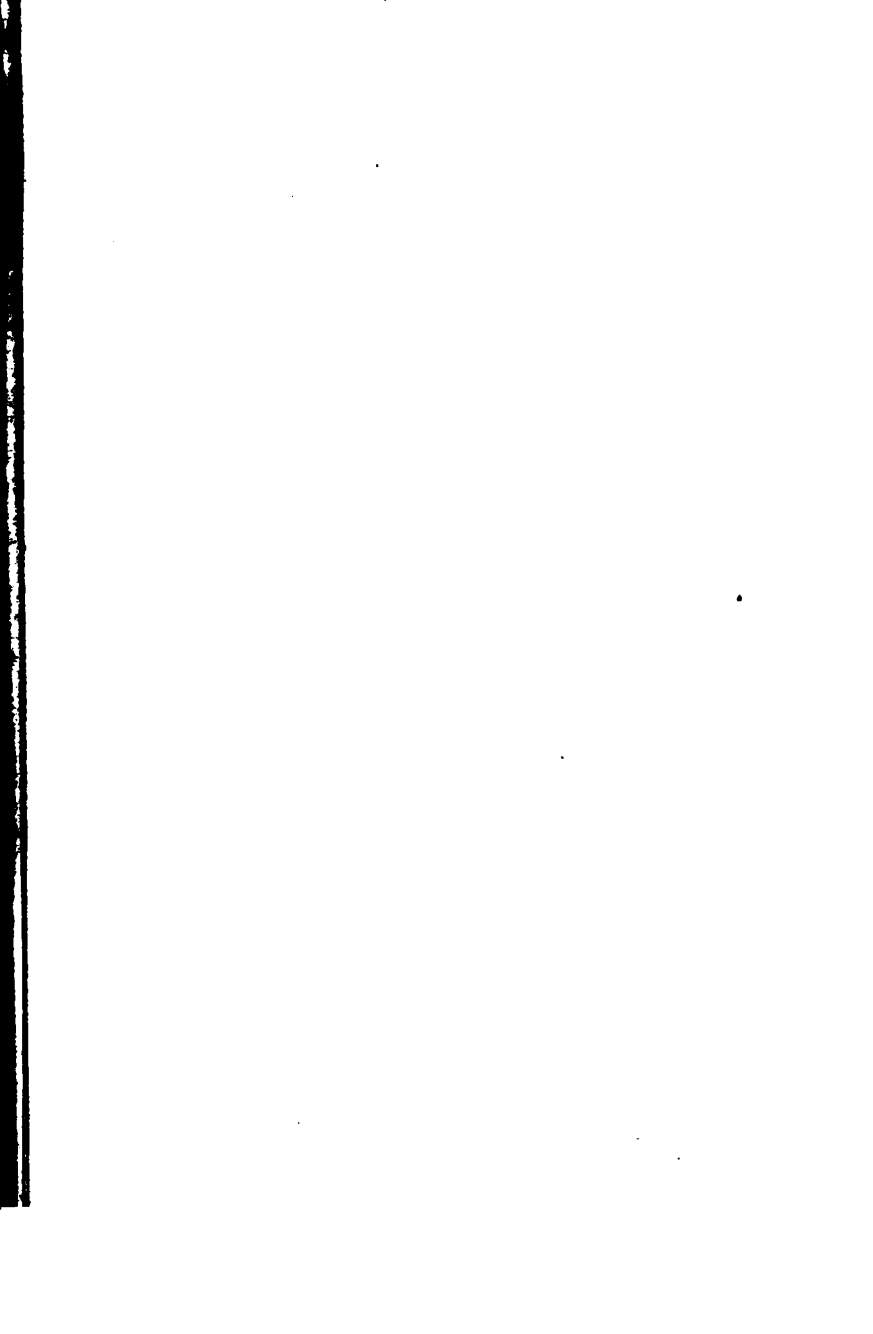
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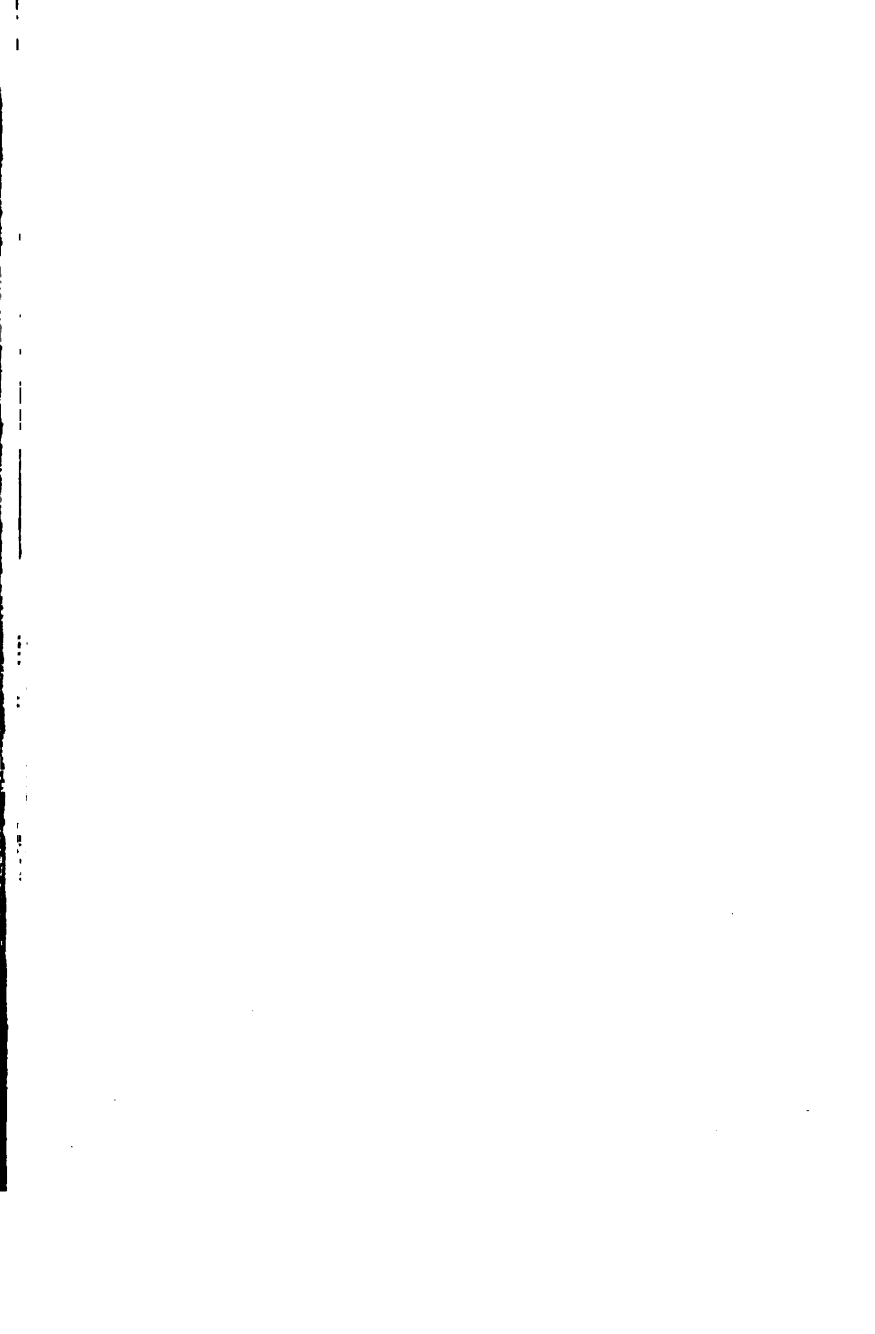








## **THE GRIP OF THE BOOKMAKER**



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# THE GRIP OF THE BOOKMAKER

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*By* PERCY WHITE

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*Author of "Mr. Bailey-Martin," "The West  
End," "The Heart of the Dancer," Etc.*

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but undaunted dignity, thorn bushes, which lead April by the hand over the turf, and the usual army of ailing evergreens, which never flourish, but seldom die.

In early summer the Square is a pleasant place. The tall, grey, narrow houses blink at one another through the leaves and sunshine, above it float the murmurs and rumours of London. Its life is a part of the great world it hears stirring around, but of which it is perhaps a less important fraction than it dreams.

There are moods in which the Square is repellent—in November dawns, for example, when fog hangs over the damp trees and tries to penetrate the basements where the kitchen fires are beginning to glimmer.

"A thing," architecturally speaking, "to thank God upon." Rutland Square is flung at you as proof of the debased taste of the period which produced it. The long rows of heavy porticoes contract into a despairing frown which no sunshine can dispel, the meaningless decorations on the bald fronts have the artistic value of the buttons which children attach to the shapeless garments of their dolls. Yet, goodness knows how! the traditions of London have given to these pretentious structures certain suggestions of fashion eminently pleasing to worshippers of the Respectable. The houses have suited themselves to their environment, and to-day it is not easy to imagine the neighbourhood which they crown

without them. They have seen the birth of two generations, and Rutland Square is still an address for which no one need blush. "You can't possibly live there with less than three thousand a year" is the verdict of the dwellers in contiguous streets upon whose notepaper there falls the shadow of the more opulent square. There is one point more to be observed—all important movements of fashion are reflected in the Square, and when the Court is in mourning the Square puts on sombre garments.

Colonel Madryn's house stands on the north side of the Square; from the windows through a gap in the houses the trees of the park are visible. The colonel is, perhaps, the most distinguished inhabitant. Madryn of Pentash—the territorial title has been accorded the family for generations—is a name which needs no embellishment. The Square murmurs, not without a certain air of respectful patronage, "The Madryns of Pentash are not well off"; it is none the less proud of them on that account. For it has been decided—even the Cones, at least in public, don't deny it—"that money isn't everything." Opulence in decent society is so common that it is now only a mediocre distinction. The picturesque shortness of means that accompanies encumbered ancestral estates appears an austere decoration which even plutocrats are sometimes tempted to assume, although, of course, this may be merely an amiable subterfuge to put us at our ease.

When Colonel Madryn approaches every street-

loafer who has faced a drill-sergeant stiffens himself into a respectful salute. From his grey moustache to his faultless boots he looks every inch an old soldier. The Square, gazing from its windows, says, "There goes the colonel!" and notes, with a certain air of possession, his soldierly stride and proud head. But it has not realised that he is a king in exile, nor that, to Madryn, of Pentash, Rutland Square appears an abode of expiation. His measure is still unknown to it. Taciturn, although courteous, he has not taken it into his confidence. But the colonel has learnt his lesson. He knows that the old order is giving way to the new, and that stern economic laws are being fulfilled at the expense of him and his class. The predestined doom has not sweetened his temper, but it has not made him complain. The grievance against destiny has stiffened his pride. The victim of depressed agriculture, unlet farms, falling rents, he is persuaded that the State ought to have found a remedy. "It has," he complains, "only helped to bleed us." In his musings Colonel Madryn associates his own decline with that of the Empire, for he smells decay in the air. Vulgar, irresponsible plebeians, it seems to him, hold most of the wealth; politicians whom he mistrusts, most of the power. The women no longer resemble the great ladies of his youth, their traditional modesty and reticence are vanishing. In all classes ideals have been vulgarised, whilst the big, shapeless, inarticulate



public has been spoiled by an insolent and noisy press. What the demagogue commenced the ha'penny paper is finishing.

There are moments of extreme exasperation, when he writes to the *Times* above the signature "Vacuus Viator," a pseudonym adopted to suggest the fall of himself and his class.

Before her marriage the Square admitted that Miss Madryn was the one beautiful young woman within its precincts, although it could count at least a dozen pretty girls. The Madryns have always been a handsome family; the old colonel, in his way, is magnificent; his son, Captain Madryn, is also famous for his looks.

At the age of twenty-two the Square had already begun to wonder why Constance Madryn was still unmarried. It was obviously improbable that she could desire to remain at home. "She did not," they said, "look that sort of girl!" Moreover, every one knew that her aunt, Miss Madryn kept house for the colonel, so that there were no domestic claims preventing her from accomplishing, what in less enlightened times than these, was regarded as a young woman's highest ambition.

Mrs. Parkington, who lives next door but one and has eight daughters (five of them excellently married), thought, and even said, that if Connie Madryn didn't look sharp, "she'd be left in the lurch." Mrs. Parkington, who is "shocked at the waste in marriageable young women," is persuaded

that it is all their own faults ; for she knows that the girl who "means matrimony" must be prepared to do at least three-fourths of the courting. This truth she has not only impressed on her daughters, but has also practised them therein, with the gratifying results to which the Square does full justice. Times, she declares, are changed ; the relations of the sexes have been revolutionised, and it is simply affectation to pretend that the business of courtship can any longer be left in safety to the men. A properly educated and modest young woman, Mrs. Parkington believes, may marry any eligible young man she chooses without the slightest sacrifice of womanly dignity, provided only that she make up her mind. She is not, she says, dealing with theories, but with facts which experience has taught her.

With this view the Square does not entirely agree. It fears that the remaining Miss Parkingtons are endeavouring to carry their young men with "too much of a rush," and, whilst anticipating success for the attack, refuses complete admiration for the method.

Gordon is a name that has many claimants. There are Gordons with grating German accents and other racial disqualifications who belong to another if equally ancient clan. But the name sat naturally enough on Philip and his father. Both were unmistakably British, and of stalwart, athletic build. Philip's mother died when he was a child of three. In his boyhood he saw little of his father.

At six he and his education were entrusted to the Miss Bassetts, two maiden ladies who lived in Brighton and pretended to keep a preparatory school. His father, he understood, was occupied in some mysterious business claiming his presence all over the country. In his early boyhood the Gordons had no settled home.

Later, when the lad was removed to a much larger school, he still spent his holidays at Brighton with the two ladies who had taught him to read and say his prayers. From them he gathered that there was some sort of mystery over-hanging him. The name "Alf Harris"—often with the suppression of the "H"—buzzed oddly in his ears. Once when he was walking along the parade—it was in the Sussex Fortnight—a big man in check clothes stopped him and said:

"You must be Alf Harris's boy, young 'un!"

"My father's name is Mortimer Gordon," the little fellow replied, defiant, but troubled.

"Is it, now," answered the other. "I shouldn't be surprised if it was that too."

After this enigmatic speech the stranger laughed, walked on, and was seen no more. "Alf Harris" struck the lad as a most unpleasant name, but when he asked Miss Laura, the youngest of his two guardians, for an explanation, she replied:

"The gentleman must have been mistaken, my dear!"

"But who is Alf Harris, Miss Laura?" he asked.

"No one we know, at all events, Phil," she answered.

But he did not miss the significant glances exchanged by the sisters.

A few days later his father called in a cab and took him to the Devil's Dyke. The big, burly man, who was deep in many schemes, smoked long cigars in silence, whilst the boy watched him inquiringly. Certainly his father was different from other men. Something half ferocious and half jovial distinguished his manner; his voice was deep, his chin very square and resolute; these characteristics, added to unflinching, blue, blood-shot eyes, gave him that formidable aspect which produces nameless terror in the young.

The cab mounted the long, dusty slopes, whilst the little fair boy and the big, heavy-shouldered man pursued each his own thoughts.

When they reached the top, and the wide prospect of grey-green channel and rolling down came in sight, the father said:

"Come along, nipper, we'll have a stroll before lunch."

They left the cab at the inn, and walked across the turf towards the west.

The larks were singing high up in the blue August sky, and there was a scent of crushed thyme in the air.

The boy glanced up at his father. They were quite alone; a green barrow behind them, a long lonely hill-slope before. The solitude and tranquillity

of the place invited confidence, and, almost before he was conscious of it, the lad heard his own voice saying :

“ Is it true that your real name is Alf Harris ? ”

He saw the granite face towering above him flush. The hand was raised as though about to strike, but the blow never came, only a stern deep voice.

“ There ain’t no such man now as Alf Harris. Never you let me hear you say it again. My name’s Mortimer Gordon. Alf Harris is dead and buried. Don’t you try to dig him up, d’yer hear ? ”

“ Yes,” answered the boy, awed by his father’s face and manner ; “ I hear.”

They returned to the inn in silence and lunched ; in the afternoon drove back, through the chalky dust, to Brighton. The day lay like a nightmare on the lad. The grim ghost of Alf Harris seemed stirring about him. His shadow stretched across the downs to the sea.

This was the first moment of hazy enlightenment. The next term at school made it painfully clear.

Philip’s friend was a lad named Charles Percival, whose father was proprietor of a popular sporting newspaper. Soon after his return Percival took Philip mysteriously aside and said :

“ Look here, Gordon, I’ve found out a rummy thing about you. My gov’nor says you’re son of Alf Harris, the bookmaker.”

The boy burst into tears of humiliation. The grisly spectre was out, rattling his bones.

"There isn't anything to blub about," said Percival, "and I swear I won't tell the other chaps. So there!"

But the spectre followed the boy to a public school and thence to Oxford, for neither the weight of Mortimer Gordon nor of his growing wealth could squeeze out Alf Harris, who laid the foundation of his fortune.

Whenever Philip Gordon felt puffed up by too much prosperity and success the shadow of Alf Harris was at hand to teach humility.

## CHAPTER II

ALF HARRIS, *alias* Mortimer Gordon in private life, had not been a bookmaker for nothing. On the August day on the downs when his son confronted him with a name which represented a part of him that he desired to be forgotten, he was already beginning to find another place for himself amid the shifting band of minor capitalists who skirmish in nondescript investments and grow rich by no visible means.

Gordon, for no one now had courage enough to address the formidable Mortimer as "Alf," had a genius for bargains, whether it was the lease of a licensed house in the centre of a hard-drinking neighbourhood or a new food for infants. A day came when the turf, professionally, at least, knew him no more. He intended to be a "Private Gentleman." Alf had to be sacrificed at the altar of Mortimer's ambition. He tried to believe that it was not for himself, but for his son, that he was cultivating the respectable instincts. As the boy grew in good looks and intelligence the father's pride proportionately swelled. The lad, in the fancy of the ex-bookmaker, "was class enough for any stakes." Nothing

in the way of schools and education was too good for him. When Phil got into the eleven at Rugeley the old man gave his friends—check-coated sportsmen of his own type—a dinner memorable even in the annals of their over-feeding; when, a few years later at the University, his son was awarded his athletic "Blue," the old man's ambition glowed like an arc-lamp at midnight.

Here was a chap whom it was worth while making a swell of!

"The boy's got my grit and his mother's good looks," said Mortimer to himself.

Meanwhile the old fellow endeavoured to shed his excrescences. He tried not to swear, and almost succeeded except with his "pals"; he also made creditable efforts to improve his "table manners." In his time he had knocked up against not a few men of good-breeding; he knew the counterfeit swell from the real thing in gentlemen. There was, he was convinced, no mistake about his son. "If," he thought, "I had been a duke Phil couldn't have better manners."

Young Gordon accepted the situation without fully realising it. His father, he knew, was rich; the memory of Alf Harris might be socially obstructive, but he was enough of a philosopher to understand that it is not given to a youth to choose his own sire.

The name of Alf Harris had never been mentioned between them since the memorable drive to the Dyke, but one day at the Rugeley and Burchester



Match the old man was suddenly flung against it. He had an extraordinary respect for British sports, and for those who cultivated them with success. Philip had just made fifty-seven "not out," and his father, swelling with pride, was walking round the crowded ground with his son.

"You played an innings any chap might be proud of, Phil," said his father. "You've nerve, my lad, and pluck!"

"I was lucky," said the lad, still warm with his triumph. "I ought to have been taken in the slips."

Suddenly, through the murmurs of the crowd, the words "There goes old Alf Harris and his boy!" reached them. Mortimer Gordon turned purple.

"Did you hear?" he growled to his son, on fire in a moment. "If any chap tells you you're son of Alf Harris the bookmaker, knock him down where he stands. There ain't no such chap. Gordon's my name, Mortimer Gordon, and always has been, though I did choose to race under another."

Philip blushed scarlet for his father, but said nothing.

"You'll understand, Phil," resumed the old man, "that I never want to hear of Alf Harris again."

This was all the explanation that his father vouchsafed.

"Why did he tell me a lie about it, though?" wondered the boy when he was alone. He seemed to have discovered a new taint in the father of whom he longed, but so hopelessly, to be proud.

But, after all, this was merely a trifling incident. Every year was moving them farther from the vulgar shadow of the bookmaker and his dubious record. The old man continued to prosper and increase in all the influence that the command of money confers even on the feeblest ; and, among "sportsmen," only those with grizzled heads remembered that Mr. Mortimer Gordon, of Rutland Square, W., had once bellowed the odds in a white hat and a monstrous check coat at Epsom and Newmarket. For the Square was reached over the bridge of foreclosed mortgages.

"Having acquired the property, Phil," he said to his son, "p'r'aps we'd better live there."

And so in due time they did.

Even his mother, whom he never knew, became one of the secret forces moulding the boy's character. A few old-fashioned photographs of a very pretty young woman, and the rapidly fading and ill-drawn pastel sketch that hung in his father's bedroom, were now the sole visible vestiges of her existence. But he knew—and this was another of his father's secrets—that she had once danced on the music-hall stage.

To conceal this, the old man once more adopted the crude policy of lying—bluffing, would have been his term for it.

One day Philip, when still a schoolboy, looking back to the dim lights at the beginning of his existence where he beheld the brown-haired, brown-eyed shadow who had played and laughed with him,

found in an old battered writing-desk where they had lain forgotten for many years, a bundle of his mother's letters. Some were signed "Bella Bellamy," and pointed to the music-halls. Their tone chilled the boy's heart. Those of a later date addressed to "her dearest Alf," spoke of "the kiddy, who was doing nicely." There was evidence of less prosperous days; one scrawl contained a request for "a couple more fivers to help out the house-keeping." These innocently vulgar letters of an uneducated woman dispelled the romantic visions that the lad had built up in his mother's honour. They also supplied another key for reading his father.

Poor Bella Bellamy spelt "affectionate" with a single f and without the final e, but whenever his father's memory drifted back to his dead wife he spoke of her as "a lady of high education and good family, who might 'a' done better than marry me, Phil, as I then was, at least."

These little touches of confidences, in the rare moments when the old man was inclined to talk, inflicted the keenest moral discomfort on his son.

"I've always been too fond of your mother, Phil to ever think of giving you a stepmother," his father once said.

It was not fear of his father, but an unconscious instinct of filial piety, which made the lad accept these confidences in respectful silence. He destroyed the letters, and never once let the old man suspect

the knowledge which had scattered all the son's illusions and revealed the father as a robust variant of the British snob.

Poor Philip's helots were of his own household. Life, he learnt before he was fifteen, was only smooth on the top. At school, where he was popular although the shadow of "Alf Harris" had followed him there, he was regarded as a "nice, bright, intelligent fellow." This meant that he was of the pure English sort, "good at games" and not too much bored by his lessons. When they gathered in the common-room and talked scandal, the junior masters rather pitied him for his father.

"But he's an only son," they said in extenuation, "and the old fellow has lots of money." Philip's house-master had so much respect for his batting that he urged his father to send him to Oxford, where this judicious estimate of his athletic aptitude received ample justification.

The adventures of the heart sometimes begin so early that the explorer, as he journeys wonderingly forward across the plains of youth, cannot trace the emotions to their first source.

For Philip the delicious, incomprehensible flutterings began during a summer vacation spent in Switzerland with his old friends the Miss Bassetts, who had abandoned Brighton for a small villa half-way up a mountain and overlooking the blue corner of a lake.

These were the days before his father had a fixed

abode, when the Bassetts were still his only friends outside school. In Miss Laura, the younger, he confided as far as it is possible for a schoolboy to confide, in an amiable and kind-hearted old maid.

The villa stood in a sloping garden surrounded by high walls, one of which separated it from a more imposing residence where Madame Bard, a Genevese lady of some literary distinction, "received," in the words of her prospectus, "a few young ladies for the purpose of superintending their studies."

At the farther end of Miss Bassetts' garden, hidden from the windows of the villa by the intervening orchard, grew an old mulberry-tree. Under its shade was an inviting seat, and here one pleasant August afternoon Philip sat reading "The Idylls of the Kings," the first poems he had ever cared for; they swept him with a golden rush into the land of romance.

Soft white clouds were sailing over the valley, leaving spaces of liquid blue across which the black swifts were shooting, uttering petulant cries. The breeze, which rustled the leaves above him, was heavy with the scent of clove-pinks and roses. In a patch of long grass the grasshoppers were chirping intermittently. When they ceased, the quiet grew all pervading; when they recommenced the air seemed very full of unseen cheerful life.

After a while, through the romantic visions of his book, he became conscious of voices in the

next garden. A little later something fell near him, but he never raised his eyes, for—

“All day long the noise of battle roll’d  
Among the mountains by the winter sea——”

But from above a sweet voice addressed him in French.

Looking up he saw, leaning over the wall, a girl with shining hair falling over her shoulders from under a straw hat ; her eyes were grey, her lips red and smiling. He took in the charming picture at a glance—she was lovely ! sweet enough, he thought, to be maid-of-honour to Guinevere or sister of Elaine.

Again the vision addressed him in French, which, as he had only studied for five years at a public school, he did not understand. He heard the word *balle*, however, and guessed the meaning of that. Rising to his feet, cap in hand, he said :

“Something about a ball, isn’t it ?”

“I’ve knocked a tennis-ball over, please. If you wouldn’t mind looking,” said the girl.

From below some one giggled ; a voice said :

“Shut up, Gertie, can’t you !”

“Have you any idea where it fell ?” asked Philip, recovering his presence of mind and his boyish dignity.

“Somewhere near the carnations, I think,” was the reply. “I’m so sorry to trouble you.”

“Don’t mention it, I beg,” he answered.

Then he searched the flower-beds, glancing up every now and then furtively at the vision on the wall.

"I did hear something drop," he said, "but thought it was an apple."

"No doubt the sound is much the same," she observed encouragingly. "Would you mind looking in that long grass? If it isn't there, please don't bother about it any more."

Philip obeyed. The grasshoppers ceased singing as he brushed through their bower.

"Ah, here it is!" he exclaimed. "Shall I throw it over to you?"

"Do, please," she answered. "Many thanks! I'm so sorry to have troubled you."

Then she disappeared. Suppressed laughter and chatter in French greeted her on the other side. That was all, but the magic circle was woven round him. He was in the land of dreams with Lancelot and Elaine.


How beautiful the garden seemed! The blazing carnations, the clambering roses wafted arrowy messages. Why was his heart beating?

He sighed without knowing why, and stood gazing where the vision had vanished like a goddess in Virgil.

In the garden the girls' voices were silent.

"Tea is ready," Miss Laura called from the upper lawn.

Then he walked back to reality.



voice murmur, "Il n'est pas trop mal, le petit!" as the procession tramped on to the iron gates.

But the day came when he met his goddess and found her human, which only increased the spell.

It was a moment of relaxed discipline at Madame Bard's seminary, and she came to the Miss Bassetts' picnic accompanied by two pupils—one, a Miss Mullins, left no trace on Philip's memory, but the other was Constance Madryn.

He was even honoured with a formal introduction—quite, it seemed, as though he were grown up.

"Mr. Gordon," said Miss Bassett, "let me present you to Miss Madryn!"

The ceremony was to him one of fluttering solemnity, but Connie Madryn held out her hand in the friendliest manner and said, "How do you do?" Philip murmured that it was rather a nice day for a picnic, and saw that she had taken off her right glove. How long and slender her fingers were! how narrow her palm! how pink her nails! He never knew before how beautiful a girl's hand can be, and, ashamed of his own big, sunburnt paws, hid them in his pockets. But her easy chatter dispelled his embarrassment. Every word she said glowed in his memory afterwards, like diamonds against black velvet.

The scene of the picnic was a rocky island crowned by an ivy-clad ruined tower, the haunt of a hundred dim legends. She told him how a jealous archduke



had once shut up his wife in the tower, and how she had escaped to Italy with her lover.

"It's all in the guide-book," she said, smiling; "and I daresay it isn't true, but, like the story of Tell and apple, all invented."

"You must be awfully clever to remember all that!" he exclaimed, for he had not read the guide-book.

"We had a lecture about it last week from the history professor," she answered, amazed at his earnestness, "and were told it was all *légendaire*."

This conversation occurred as they were walking down to the boats. Philip noticed that he was the only "man" present except the young English chaplain of frail health, who had the cure of British souls on Sunday and caught insects in a gauze-net for the remainder of the week. The sky was azure, the lake a shining sheet of sunlit blue; the road descended through fir-woods and thickets of hazel to the lower slopes where, in the vineyards, the grapes were growing purple. A sense of young pure life filled the world. The cow-bells, tinkling up in the mountain pastures, rang faint chimes of elfin melancholy.

When Madame Bard, walking behind with the elder Miss Bassett, glanced after the young couple and said, "Ils sont trop jeunes pour avoir des idées," she did not accurately describe the poise of feeling in the boy.

Where the others beheld a tall schoolgirl of the

awkward age but with the promise of beauty, he saw a lovely vestal diffusing the light of her enchantment.

The discovery made him silent. His companion, however, was far from impressed by the solemnity of the meeting. She only saw "a nice, manly looking boy," who seemed very respectful but rather "shy." She was even tempted to assume faint airs of condescension, and turned the conversation to "games" as the subject best suited to his age and interest. She thus learnt that he was at Rugeley and in the fifth form. Did he know a boy named Elmsley, then? Yes, he did; they were in the same form. Elmsley, he believed, was Lord Dartfield's younger son.

"Yes," said Connie Madryn, "and my cousin."

"Oh!" exclaimed Philip.

Elmsley was considered rather a swell at school; the relationship seemed to remove her further from Philip, who had already learnt that one is not son of Alf Harris for nothing.

"I don't think you care much for Willie Elmsley?" she said encouragingly.

"Yes, I do. Why do you think so?"

"You said 'Oh' as though you were disappointed. I think, myself, that Willie is rather conceited."

"I never noticed that," Philip replied. "Besides, he isn't at all a bad 'half-back.'"

"Is he clever?"

"He isn't a 'swot.' He's supposed to be going into the Army."

"Yes, I know. I've a brother at Sandhurst. Papa

was in the Army, you know. He commanded the 30th Lancers. But there are the boats. I mean to row. Can you?"

"I scull a good deal at school," said Philip.

"Then we'll pull one of the boats—you and I. You arrange it."

"There's a light one; let's take that. 'Je prenny vôter bateau'!" cried Philip, with an air of authority to the expectant owner of the craft.

And so, after some discussion as to the crew, Philip, Connie Madryn, Miss Laura, and a German lady embarked together, whilst the boatman, on whose presence Miss Bassett insisted, steered.

The day was a pageant of wonderful experiences, half-meaningless, but inexpressibly delightful to the boy. He wondered at the easy swing of the girl's lithe figure as she tugged at the sculls—was ever human being so graceful? and yet her stroke was far from perfect measured by the standard of Rugeley. At her request he even dared "coach" her; obediently she squared her slim shoulders and "reached well forward" towards the shining points of her brown shoes. Then, later, they clambered together among the pines, watching the green lizards as they darted off among the fallen masonry, and mounting together to the narrow chamber whence eight hundred years ago a mythic duchess had escaped from a tyrannous spouse.

"Just as I would," said the girl, "if I ever married a man who dared be cruel to me!"

"As if one ever would!" exclaimed the boy.

Returning in the twilight, with a pale moon hanging low between the mountains and one star wistfully shining in the darkening blue—a signal that the day was done, both of them were quiet.

"It has been such a jolly day that I'm sorry it's over," said the girl.

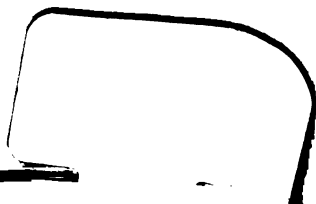
"That's what the star is saying," said he.

"Shall I ever see you again?" he asked, when they separated before Miss Bassetts' garden door.

"Come and see us at Pentash," said she. "Get Willie Elmsley to bring you."

The moon was now high in the sky, and the shadows of the pines black on the grass. The boy saw everything with a sort of inner vision.

"Something strange must be about to happen," he thought as he fell asleep.



## CHAPTER IV

OF the anticipations circling around Philip's charming friend with the untrained luxuriance of youthful fancy, not one was realised.

That same evening Madame Bard received a telegram directing her to send Miss Madryn home at once, and on the following day the girl had vanished.

"Il paraît," Madame Bard explained, "que Madame Madryn est dangereusement malade."

Thus ended Philip Gordon's first raid into a realm created by the emotions and governed by fancy. The excursion, brief, but beautiful, had left its trophies in the sacred places.

But the vision soon began to wane. Six months later the memory of the sunlit girl seen over the clambering roses, and the picnic on the lake resembled the luminous impressions of a pleasant dream. A healthy English lad of sound appetite cannot breathe with comfort in such an attenuated atmosphere. This one descended to earth again after beating his wings for a spell among rosy clouds.

At school he spoke of the meeting with Miss Madryn to her cousin, Willie Elmsley.

"She said something about a man from Rugeley," said Elmsley indifferently, "but never mentioned his name. Suppose she couldn't remember it! Her mother—that's my aunt, died, you know, at the end of the vac. That's whom I'm in mourning for."

Young Gordon, with the shadow of Alf Harris always across his path, took this omission to mention his name as a hint that she did not desire his friendship. In a year's time, except that he was never heard again to describe poetry as "rot" and that he took a deeper interest in the love entanglements with which classical literature abounds, the adventure left no visible traces in his mind.

As Philip grew older his influence over his father increased. The boy was such a "dashed" gentleman, just the sort of chap the old man wanted to carry on the name which did not belong to him. It was to please him that the idea of the Army was abandoned, for scarlet and gold lace at one moment had much attracted the youth.

"The law's the perfession for you, Phil, my lad," said Mortimer Gordon. "The 'varsity first, then the Bar, then Parliament; for it 'ill run to that, Phil, and the deuce knows what besides. No training like the law. Nothing like it to teach a chap how far he can bluff in safety! The law's the only thing to reg'late a chap's dealings with other men. If I'd had a little of it behind me I dessay I shu'd 'a' been better off by a thousand or two. The Army's a mug's game."

Ambitions of which the old man had never dared

dream for himself seemed to come well within the range of the probable for his son.

Phil must marry a swell's daughter and found a family. Those were the stakes he was in training for. Old Gordon thought of this every morning of his life when he scraped his resolute chin with the razor.

"You expect a lot of me," Philip said, when his prospects were discussed.

"Well, old chap, not more than I've a right to," his father would reply.

Meanwhile at Oxford the young man had everything he wanted. To a certain point old Gordon read men like books.

"Let the lad get used to money," he said to his lawyer, Peter Davies, whose fortune he had helped to make, "then he won't make a mess of it when he gets full control."

In spite of the temptations with which indulgence was strewing the way, Philip Gordon left the University with some character for scholarship, a good reputation as a sportsman, and a wider acquaintance with men and things than is usual at his age. Perhaps his misgivings helped to make him modest. He felt that his luck, comfort, and success were all based on the spectral Alf Harris, shut up in the Gordon cupboard. This *revenant* quenched presumption. "We are rather like respectable pirates," thought the philosophic youth, "licensed to sail under the Union Jack."

But he appreciated his father's affection, realised

the scope and nature of the parental ambition, and felt the pathos of it. Altruistic ambition of the meaner sort has always melancholy and humorous sides ; to these young Gordon was not blind.

Sanguine and prosperous youth marches forward, head in air, seeking pleasure till the day comes when a touch stirs into agreeable undulations the delicate tentacles which feed the feelings.

The accident which had made Philip's boyish emotions vibrate years ago in Switzerland, stirred them again the year he left college. He was popular by nature rather than design. Amiable, intelligent, unaggressive, gifted with a sense of humour which allowed him to laugh even at himself, his prosperity scarcely excited envy. There was always Alf Harris for the ill-natured "to thank God upon." But it was agreed that "the fellow never abused his luck," especially by Elmsley, who constantly basked in it. They had been "up" at Brazenknob at the same time, but Elmsley, the younger son of an impoverished family with growing appetites but decreasing means, had spent money which he dared not ask his father to pay and "gone down" with his debts still on his back. Once when he was staggering in half a panic under their weight, Philip came to the rescue. Mr. Peter Davies, the old man's lawyer, was called in in secret, and the matter was settled without Elmsley's family hearing of it, and the creditors being appeased by the promise of annual contributions towards the liquidation of their debts.



But Peter Davies, who knew that there were "few things which old Mortimer Gordon didn't find out," who admired his friend's talents, and faithfully served his interests, told him the whole story.

"Only," said he, "you mustn't tell Philip."

"Not me!" replied Mortimer. "Look here, Peter, young Elmsley's a chap worth buying if not too dear. Phil meant it all in the way of friendship, of course, but the investment ain't a bad 'un."

It gratified the old man's vanity to remember that his son had helped the youngest son of a peer out of a "tight place," for he had a truly British respect for the social inequalities, and this transaction seemed to readjust the balance in his favour.

Philip was at this time living in convenient rooms off Piccadilly, and supposed to be reading for the Bar in his leisure moments, whilst his father was occupying temporarily an old house in Surrey, with big stables and wide paddocks. Here, in the eyes of an appreciative neighbourhood, he shone as a sportsman of the old school. But a part of his conduct was still in the darkness. He loved liberty, and had not yet finished sowing that squalid second crop of wild-oats which widowers of his temperament secretly cultivate.

To his friend Peter Davies he admitted that "his pals weren't exactly the sort that he'd have Phil choose."

"You see," he explained, "we've been bred in different schools. And my son and me needn't fall

over one another. The course is big enough for both."

The young man left his very vigorous sire to his own amusements, and tried to look in other directions.

Whatever his conduct in secret, the old man's morals—so far, at least, as they found verbal expression for his son's benefit, were irreproachable. If he allowed himself much of the latitude of the Sultan of the popular imagination, he did his best to indulge himself in the obscurity that becomes the diversions of grey hairs.

One morning just after breakfast Elmsley walked into Philip Gordon's room and found him sitting by the open window reading a French novel.

Philip closed the book and offered him a cigarette. Elmsley said he had no taste for smoking paper and helped himself to a cigar. It was, he said, a ripping morning, much too fine to stick in town. He was going to play golf. Was Gordon free that evening? if so, would he come to a dance—heaps of pretty girls and supper from Gunter's.

"Where is it?" Gordon asked.

"Rutland Square, Mrs. Parkington's."

Then Elmsley explained that Mrs. Parkington, who was widow of General Parkington, had commissioned him to bring "a few nice young men."

"She has five married daughters and has three dangerous ones left, so before you say 'Yes,' I warn

you," Elmsley added. "They live next door to my cousins. I remember you met Connie Madryn years ago in Switzerland. She'll be there"

This decided Philip. His father was coming to town that afternoon; he had intended taking him to a music-hall, the one form of entertainment which diverted the old gentleman. This instinct of filial piety was now promptly suppressed.

"I'll come like a shot," he said.

So they went, and young Gordon made his second serious plunge into enchanted streams. He drove to Rutland Square in a hansom with Elmsley, feeling as one about to revisit some charming but dimly remembered haunt of boyhood.

What should he see there?

He recalled the fragrant garden, the scent of clove-pinks, the sunlit wall, the girl with the bright hair above the clambering roses and the background of mountains. The radiance was outside the world of fact, but a human touch might make it glow with life again.

As he mused Elmsley talked.

"The Madryns, you know, have had to let Pentash. Saltwood, the man who invented 'Lactavis,' the new food for infants, has taken it. The colonel's a little sour—thinks the times are out of joint and all that, although he only tells you so in confidence. My cousin's pretty, but inclined to be haughty—at least, so fellows think. Perhaps it's because she has no taste for Bounders. The Square

is socially rather 'between the two' and a little thick with them."

The cab stopped before one of the tall grey houses which, in a blaze of festive light, contrasted with its gloomy neighbours, and the young men joined the throng mounting the stairs to the landing where Mrs. Parkington, assisted by a group of healthy daughters, married and unmarried, all of sanguine, masterful type, received the guests.

She was so glad to see Mr. Gordon, and had heard so much of him from Mr. Elmsley! She might have added that her information included Alf Harris, the founder of the family fortunes, but perhaps she had forgotten the spectre, for she begged to present Philip to her daughters, her "bouquet of girls, Mr. Gordon, as flatterers call them."

The young ladies most graciously received him and so he passed on, after inscribing his name on their programmes.

The big reception-room was humming with voices, the violins were beginning to thrill.

"There are Miss Madryn and my cousin," said Elmsley, whose steps Philip followed. "Come and be introduced."

Miss Madryn, the aunt, bore a family likeness to her brother the colonel, only the lines were less severe.

"She's quite a good sort," whispered the confiding Elmsley as they approached the ladies.

When Philip recognised in the stately, self-

contained young woman the girl who had clambered with him among the ruins of the Duchess's Tower, he was filled with the sense of wonder which arises from the feeling of mystery behind reviewed impressions—the indefinable something which gives memory a soul. Her beauty seemed to flood the room and made his heart beat. Elmsley had prepared him for something pretty and peevish, but he could see no trace of disappointment in the curved lips and shining eyes.

And she actually remembered him!

"It isn't the first time we have met," she said. "I never forget faces, and you are less altered than you imagine."

Then they talked of Switzerland. She had visited the Duchess's Tower last year. The same green lizards were running over the rocks, and Madame Bard still received pupils. The only change seemed in herself.

This struck him as exquisitely pathetic. But now he knew what was happening to him. The processes might be mysterious, but he was not blind to their meaning. Something said, "You are falling in love, Philip!"

Her smile and eyes bathed him in wonderful glows of content. Nothing, he thought, could have been friendlier than her manner, and although he was soon swept away from her by the movements of a crowded ballroom, he danced with her twice and felt the waft of her lovely hair in his face.

All his youth was stirring in his heart as the glamour which the girl had thrown over him eight years before renewed its magic.

When he left the house, alone, and walked home through the silent dawn a purpose had formed in him unconsciously.

## CHAPTER V

WHENEVER a reasoning human creature enters on a new possession he must sooner or later decide to what selfish personal use the treasure shall be put. It is even so with the youth, who has broken into love's rose-garden, whither, it seems to him, no raider has forced a way before. At first the wonders of the place perplex him with their rapture, but soon a moment arrives when the colour and fragrance cease entirely to enthrall. He asks, "What next?" and replies, "I will be king of this enchanted place!"

Some men will, if encouraged, shout their secret from the housetop, others hide it with care, unwilling to share it save with the cause creating it. These are the wiser, for it is only when an unreasoning passion is divulged that the ridiculous aspects of it are manifested.

"Of course," Mrs. Parkington had said to Philip, "I don't expect people, especially young men, to call simply because they have danced at my house, but we shall be delighted to see *you* at any time, Mr. Gordon, and are always 'at home' on Fridays!"

Perhaps Philip, following Elmsley's example, would have preferred to be fashionable and not to

call had he not remembered this was a special case. The Parkingtons lived next door but one to Colonel Madryn. This decided him, and a few days after the ball the young man found himself in Mrs. Parkington's drawing-room, the only male among a score of women.

"How good of you to come!" she exclaimed, sitting down beside him to protect him from the shyness which she knew oppresses a youth lost in a crowd of women.

One of the younger Miss Parkingtons, Miss Laura, he thought, handed him tea whilst her mother entertained him.

"How odd, your meeting with Miss Madryn—the niece, I mean, of course, Mr. Gordon—after all these years! Miss Madryn told me of it. Those sudden meetings *are* so charming! I was so glad for her. You see, she was expecting Mr. Drayton, and you made up for her disappointment."

Mrs. Parkington meant him to understand that it was foolish to waste time next door but one when her own house was so full of attractive girls. Her visitor was too innocent to take the warning. She added:

"Have you met Mr. Drayton?"

"I've never even heard of him," he answered.

"How silly of me!" exclaimed the wily matron. "It wasn't likely Miss Madryn would have told you."

And here the doubts began to shake haggard heads at Philip.



"Why shouldn't she?" he asked.

"I have an idea young ladies don't tell young men about the young gentleman in whom they are interested, that is all," replied the playfully wise lady.

Philip rushed at the red flag.

"Is Miss Madryn engaged to Mr. Drayton, then?"

"Not so far as the Square knows," she answered with her most guileless smile; "but we sometimes foresee things. He is very rich, you know,—coal mines all over the place!—and I hear—— But this is gossip, you know, Mr. Gordon, and I mustn't regale you with it."

Miss Laura Parkington, who insisted on relieving the young man of his cup, brought a change in the conversation.

"Ah, Laura," said her mother, "you must ask Mr. Gordon to give you some tips. He knows all about racing. Laura, I must tell you, Mr. Gordon, is making a book. Of course she only bets in gloves; still, she likes to know the names of the horses which are going to win."

"Quite a common weakness," he answered. "But I think Miss Parkington might back Centaur for a place at Sandown next week."

Mrs. Parkington left her seat to welcome a visitor, her daughter filled it, and plunged into sporting talk.

Mrs. Parkington was not unacquainted with the proverb warning us not to speak of ropes in the houses of men who have been hanged, but she

meant her description of Philip as "a famous sportsman" for a signal that she was acquainted with his bookmaking beginnings and ready to accept them in a most generous spirit. Was not one of the charming girls from her "bouquet of daughters" an amateur at the same trade? Here was a hostage for you!

Of course Mrs. Parkington did not argue the matter out crudely thus, but if her mental processes could have been caught and pinned to a wall the warning and its origin would not have been obscure. Philip took the hint. His bookmaking blood was constantly being held upon him by friendly people.

"We know all about you," they politely signalled, "and don't in the least mind. You're well off and we're not old-fashioned."

When he and Laura Parkington had exhausted the turf prospects of the moment, they discoursed of her own family. He learnt that Lucy golfed and played hookey; that Anne went on triumphant tennis and croquet tours; that Maude was an expert in cricket records and "almost lived at Lords," whilst at the same time, when necessary, she became an adept at serious music; and as for Emily, well, probably Mr. Gordon had read some of her short stories; one had appeared in the *Monthly Meal* for April, and another had been accepted by the editor of *The Amazing Magazine Company, Ltd.*

"She writes verse, too, doesn't she?" Philip inquired at random.

"Oh, yes, when she's in the right mood. *The Athenæum* once printed her poem on Dante's birthday. Emily received the proof, but the verses have not yet appeared. No doubt it is being held over until a suitable moment."

But although he heard a great deal of talk, he came away without learning more of Miss Madryn. Alf Harris had not prevented him from receiving a warm welcome at Mrs. Parkington's, but what mischief might he not work next door but one?

Alf Harris seemed the shot which is tied to the convict's leg to prevent his escape. Melancholy began to take the place of elation. The poor youth wandered vaguely in the neighbourhood of Rutland Square, and although he constantly passed some one or other of the Miss Parkingtons (often in hansom cabs with young men and golf-clubs), he only saw Miss Madryn once and then she did not see him. She was walking with a tall, dark man who wore a very black moustache, and was listening intently to what he said. This spectacle added much to the lover's misery. The man was Drayton, no doubt. Elmsley was waiting on his father, who was at Homburg with a fit of gout, and Philip was ashamed to write to him for information.

One day a ray of happiness penetrated the clouds of his depression. A card inscribed with the word "Music" reached him, announcing that Colonel and Miss Madryn were "At Home" on a certain date from 4 to 6.30. His relief was great. Alf Harris's

shadow was evidently not ominous enough to close the Madryns' doors.

Meanwhile, although Philip Gordon's disturbed peace was not advertised by his manner, his father, a singularly shrewd observer, began to suspect that "something was up." "The chap," he reflected, "couldn't be working too hard." In fact, his son did not seem to be working at all. The books he noticed on his son's table were not law books. As a man of action he disliked books—a fact he tried to conceal from the boy who had won reputation by them. Some of the books the boy was reading had short lines. Mortimer Gordon, who stayed two nights with his son in his rooms, discovered that these were poetry. What did this mean? Mortimer's ignorance of books was astonishing, especially when compared with his knowledge of men. He had never, so far as he could remember, read a book in his life except the turf-guide; but he was not proud of illiteracy as stupider "sportsmen" often are. He felt there might be "something in them."

"The deuce knows where you get your fondness for books from, Phil," he said. "I don't recall that your poor mother was partial to reading, and books were never much in my line."

"It needn't be atavistic," observed the ironical youth.

"What's that?"

"Oh, weakness inherited from an ancestor."

But the old man thought of his betting-books and

shied off at further inquiry. Still, he felt the chap was moping, and what the deuce had he to mope for? He consulted his old friend and counsellor, Peter Davies, the one man in whose wisdom he believed.

"The boy's reading poetry, Peter," he said; "what does that mean?"

"He must be in love, then," replied the lawyer. "Poetry's a sort of safety-valve for the sentiments in literary temperaments."

"Is it, though?" said old Gordon. "Well, there was bound to be a girl in the case soon. You don't fancy it's a little barmaid baggage or chorus girl, do you?"

"Goodness knows," answered Davies. "I don't. Remember what you were at his age, old chap. You ain't quite a saint now, for the matter of that."

When Mortimer saw the Madryns' invitation on his son's chimney-piece he received a curious shock, and enlightenment began. He knew who they were; and had once had with the colonel, then a subaltern in a cavalry regiment, dealings which he desired forgotten. He proceeded cautiously.

"D'you know Colonel Madryn then, Phil?" he asked.

"No; but I have met his daughter, who is Elmsley's cousin," answered the young man quickly.

The flicker in the son's eyes and the blush which followed it were not lost on the father.

"The colonel ought to be a fine old swell by this

time," continued Mortimer. "I should say we were much of an age. There's a son, isn't there?"

"Yes; abroad with his regiment."

His father paused for a moment, reflecting, then said:

"Daughter a nice sort of girl, eh, Phil?"

"I met her years ago in Switzerland, when I was staying with the Miss Bassetts."

Mortimer Gordon observed that his question was unanswered, but was too cunning to press it.

"Did she remember you when you met her last, Phil?—I mean with Mr. Elmsley."

He treated Elmsley's name with respect because he was a peer's son.

"Yes," said Philip, colouring again.

He was ashamed to find a certain pleasure in talking of her. The feeling was a new one to him. He felt it ought not to be encouraged.

"Good-looking?" inquired his father.

"She is considered beautiful."

"Where does she live, Phil?"

"In Rutland Square."

Mortimer was so astounded that he exclaimed:

"Well, I'm blowed!"

"Why?" asked his son.

"Because one of those houses belongs to me, Phil, and I've been thinking of starting our joint establishment there."

Young Gordon remained silent. The spirit of coincidence seemed working towards a definite goal.

Mortimer saw the look on his son's face and was silent too. The old man was beginning to understand ; the vanity of the plebeian stirred within him. He was proud "it wasn't some little baggage out of a milliner's shop, but the daughter of a real old swell." The thought was an ugly one to dissect, but whatever idea formed itself in his brain seemed to him respectable, or else how could it be there? In some dim way of his own he was grateful the boy was looking up, not down. This instinct was part of his own scheme, and from that day he began to watch his son very carefully.

## CHAPTER VI

MORTIMER GORDON went to his friend Davies with his discovery.

"You're right, Peter," said he, "the boy is sweet on a girl, but not one of the wrong sort. She's a real swell's daughter!"

When Davies heard who the swell was he raised his black eyebrows and said that the Madryns of Pentash were about the proudest family in England.

"But Phil doesn't want the fam'ly," answered Mortimer, "but the daughter."

"Much the same sort o' thing," replied Davies. "Your boy'll get over it, like the rest of 'em, Mortimer."

But this was not the right tone, and the old man frowned.

"I'm not so sure as he need get over it. Phil's a fine young fellow. Show me a finer one in the country if you can! The girl's sure to take to him. Besides, the fam'ly's hard up, and, as swells gen'rally keep an eye on the main chance, there's no reason why the thing shouldn't come off—if properly managed."



"Good Lord, Mortimer! Fancy you match-making!" said Davies.

"Why the h—— shouldn't I?" swore the old man. "Ain't I willing and able to provide for a daughter-in-law? Phil shall marry a swell's daughter if he wants to. He won't need ask anything with her."

Davies was impressed. "He's a very grand old snob, indeed!" he thought, and admired Mortimer's ambition for his son.

Meanwhile, Philip Gordon went to the Madryns' "At Home" in a reverend spirit. Musical "At Homes" with amateur music are an economical but unexciting method of returning hospitalities. If he had been invited to hear Apollo sing the young man would never have approached High Olympus with a spirit of greater diffidence than he entered the Madryns' hall in Rutland Square, and left his coat and hat in the colonel's study.

Whilst the servant was pinning a number to them, Philip discovered on the mantelpiece a photograph of Miss Madryn taken when she was a schoolgirl, and the austere little room, with the usual depressing outlook on a backyard, glowed with invisible radiance.

Encouraged by the photograph, he went upstairs in the wake of three young men whose art, revealed in collar and hair, gave them that appearance of detachment from ordinary life and conduct which is apparently essential to the comfort of serious music, and in his turn was received by Miss Madryn, who arranged and was responsible for her brother's parties.

Miss Madryn murmured that she was glad to see him, and passed him on to her niece, who smiled graciously.

"I hope you are going to play, Miss Madryn," he said, rushing at the one bald conversational suggestion that presented itself.

"How do you know I play?" she asked.

"Because you told me at the picnic you practised two hours a day."

She was amused that he should seize on "the picnic" as though a significant incident in her past.

"You have a wonderful memory, Mr. Gordon," she answered. "But let me introduce you to my father."

Colonel Madryn was at the other side of the room, listening to a group of ladies.

"He is a splendid old fellow!" thought the youth, almost, it seemed to him, the right father for the beautiful daughter.

The colonel shook hands with him and hoped he was fond of music. Philip replied that he was. The colonel said that he was glad to hear it. Then Miss Madryn marched him on to a young lady sitting on an ottoman waiting for notice, introduced them, and returned to her aunt at the door, where, whilst his new acquaintance talked opera, Philip furtively watched her.

How strange it seemed! He had entered the house of his beloved, yet nothing mysterious had marked his coming.

Young ladies sang and young gentlemen sang ; a lady played a long piece on a violoncello, but Miss Madryn never approached the piano. In due course he took his new acquaintance to tea, which was served in the dining-room. Here he met Mrs. Parkington and her musical daughter. She was glad to see him. The other girls, she said, were playing golf. What a crowd there was ! It was scarcely possible to mount the stairs. Another young man relieved him of his charge, and he helped Mrs. Parkington return to the drawing-room.

"You must," she said, "hear Emily play. She has worked so hard and Signor Cellini says that 'he takes her quite seriously.' There can be no doubt of it, the child is quite an artist."

Meanwhile Miss Madryn (the aunt) was whispering to Miss Parkington, who sat down and played an interminable sonata with a wooden brilliancy creditable to her resolution. Her mother, seated on the only available chair, listened complacently. The sonata represented an audible asset.

"She is wonderful !" replied Philip politely to the maternal appeal when the piece was over.

Then the movements of the room brought him to the side of Connie Madryn.

"I hope you admired Miss Parkington's playing," she said. "Quite an 'ordeal by touch,' wasn't it ?"

He thought the wit of this dazzling, although he was capable of adding only a feeble "Quite !" to its embellishment.

"I hope you enjoyed the dance the other night," she continued. "The Square is quite proud of Mrs. Parkington's bouquet of daughters. Of course she told you of them?"

"Oh, yes," he acquiesced. "They must be most accomplished. They all seem to excel in something."

"Naturally," said she; "they are intended for transplanting into the gardens of happy men."

With this little gibe and a smile she left him.

"Sweet cynic!" murmured his heart. The idea seemed fragrant with the most delicate humour.

But six o'clock struck from the steeple of St. Peter's. The people were rapidly leaving. Outside in the Square a faint luminous dust haze was shining over the trees. It was time to go!

In the street he began to count the profit or loss of his visit.

"There were such a lot of people," he told himself, "that I couldn't expect her to show much interest in me."

But then she had not been indifferent! The claims of early acquaintance seemed so sacred that indifference would have been outrageous. Surely she had permitted him to approach nearer her sympathies. Had she not made two charming jokes at Mrs. Parkington's expense. They were not in the least ill-natured, for Mrs. Parkington was almost a professional matchmaker, and deserved the satire which she provoked.

A lover always finds little pegs—invisible to the

world—on which to hang his hopes. He had heard Constance Madryn say that she often went to the Park. Here were surely future possibilities of—well, at least, bowing to her. The other comfort was that he had heard and seen nothing of Mr. Drayton.

With the shadowy encouragements and the memory of her voice and eyes, he was happy for the rest of the evening. The veering of the line of feeling in the contrary direction would have made him miserable; but whether for pleasure or pain the new interest was burning in his life like a white light.

On the following morning he dressed with extraordinary care—the accurate adjustment of collar and tie seemed a matter of almost spiritual importance—and started for the Park. It was one of those beautiful June mornings, when London, under its least sinister aspect of soft blue sky and young green leaves, makes you forget the heavy breathings of its gross, shapeless life.

At the end of the street Philip met his father.

“Hullo, Philip!” said the old man. “What a toff you are! I was coming to see you.”

“I had no idea you were in town,” replied his son. At that moment he wished him elsewhere. In a pot-hat, a check coat, with broad tails and wide sporting pockets, looking big and burly in the morning sunshine, the old man assorted ill with the vague dreams in the young man’s mind.

“Came up yesterday,” said his father, “and went with Peter Davies to see the new” (he pronounced it

"noo") "bally at the 'Empire.' Stopping at Potts's, in Jermyn Street, you know."

He surveyed his son approvingly, thought him "thorough-bred," and added:

"There's no mistake about it, me lad, you are a toff! Now I shouldn't wonder if you might be going—ha! ha! ha!—going courtin', eh!"

The young man, feeling himself bludgeoned, winced and blushed.

"Glad you're in such fine spirits, sir," he answered, "I'm simply off for a stroll. You look as though you had business on hand. If you like I'll meet you at 1.30 at the Celibate Club, and we'll lunch together."

The old man, laughing, placed a big hand with thick, stumpy fingers on his son's shoulder, and shook him affectionately.

"That's right, Phil," he said, "shunt your old dad when he's in the way. Cert'nly, he ain't up to your form this morning—not up to Park form, is he? But I'm your man, Phil. You shall lunch me at your club. I'll be there. I am going to have me hair cut, and, after being trimmed, to Tattersalls'."

Mortimer was proud to lunch with his son at the smart club into which Oxford influences had admitted him. The old man was rather popular there, and liberal in the smoking-room with a famous brand of cigars.

When Philip walked off his father watched him admiringly. He knew that his son had asked him to lunch as a compensation for ridding himself

of him for the present, but he was not the least annoyed.

"The chap has his little game to play," he reflected. "And what a figure the lad's got!—deep in the chest, narrow in the flank, square in shoulder—and such a buck, too! He shall have the girl he wants, or my name ain't Mortimer Gordon."

He was fond of swearing by Mortimer Gordon. It seemed to scare Alf Harris's ghost.

Then he watched his son till he was out of sight, and, starting to Bond Street, unconsciously tried to imitate the graceful swing of the youth's stride.

Meanwhile Philip made his way to the Row, and pretended to look at the riders because, if she was there, he knew that she would be walking.

The riders cantered up and down, the flanks of well-groomed horses shone in the sun, the wood-pigeons in the trees cooed. From the corner of his eye he noted all comers approaching from the direction which the Madryns should take.

Then suddenly something jumped within him. Above the ladies' hats, through the sunshades, close to a late thorn-tree in bloom, he saw Constance Madryn walking with her aunt and a lady whom he recognised as one of yesterday's guests.

The ladies took chairs near the railing. In a bed behind them the flowering shrubs were blazing in the sunshine.

Miss Madryn and her friend were talking; Constance was silent.

Philip thought she looked bored.

Then, but without consciously making up his mind, he walked boldly up to them, and found himself insisting on the extreme beauty of the weather.

They agreed that it was a delightful morning. Constance moved her chair, allowing him room to take one at her side if he wished, and he sat down.

The two elder ladies resumed their conversation, which was apparently to the disadvantage of some other lady whom he did not know; but Constance turned to him, and hoped he hadn't been greatly bored yesterday.

"I enjoyed the music immensely," he replied; "but I was sorry you did not play."

"Why? Because I told you years ago that I practised two hours a day, and you wished to see with what result?"

"I somehow wondered what music you would choose," he replied.

"Chopin, probably. I've learnt nothing new for years, and never practise."

"Perhaps you had too much of it when you were at Madame Bard's."

"It is vanity," she answered. "I don't care to do what so many people can do better."

"That's a capital argument to excuse most of us for doing nothing," said he, smiling.

Her amiability struck him as an exquisite manifestation of human sweetness. He also observed that she no longer seemed bored.



Miss Madryn's invitation was suggested by her own reasons. Had the happy youth guessed these his happiness would have been destroyed like a pricked air-ball, but, innocent of all guile, he returned down the dwindling Row to the club on an eddy of rapture.

The atmosphere seemed pure and æthereal—such as is breathed by knights and ladies in enchanted dawns; the chequered light on the gravelled path at his feet fell through magic leaves from happier skies.

It was not till he saw his father's broad back in the big check coat that he awoke. The old man, turning round from the club steps where he waited, beheld his look.

"You seem pleased with your morning, Phil," he said. "It seems to me London smells stuffy."

"I was never so fond of it before," answered his son.

The old fellow was touched. He was a selfish old man, but he loved his son; his pride in him had added to his affections till it had become as nearly allied to fanaticism as any altruistic sentiment in such a nature well can be.

"I'm glad to see you so dev'lish pleased, old chap; happiness o' that sort's a pretty rare thing. Quite the most prosp'rous chaps miss it. It's the sort o' thing that only drops to the young 'uns; what with gout an' acidity o' the blood old fellows, however well off, don't reach it. But did you see the girl, Phil? And was she sweet? Tell your dad, lad.

He's a bit of a rough 'un, without your polish and advantages, but, by God ! he's your best friend."

They were standing in the hall of the club, behind the big swinging doors. The old man's voice was gentle and there was a softer look in his bold eyes. His son was touched.

"You've been the best and kindest father to me," he said. Then he hesitated a moment, checked by the modesty of a first passion, yet feeling his confidence held close in the net of his father's affection.

"Tell me, lad, it'll be better. I guess the lady's name. Is it Miss Madryn, daughter o' Colonel Madryn, of Pentash ?"

"Yes, I love her."

The young man grew white.

"Then, by God, you shall marry her !" exclaimed the old man. "Miss Madryn o' Pentash," he repeated, dwelling pompously on the name. "Let's go to lunch an' drink her health in a glass o' champagne."

They went into the dining-room, the old man's hand resting proudly on the young man's shoulder.

## CHAPTER VII

MORTIMER GORDON was impressed by his son's confidence, and his pride was gratified. He had his own ideas of a father's duties ; a man of action, he was disinclined to leave developments in other hands than his own, not excepting those of Providence.

Phil, he thought, was running for big stakes. "Just like the lad," whispered vanity, "to fall in love with Madryn's daughter !" It seemed a compliment to himself ! He was conscious, however, of complications. The father might "be nasty," and there might be "trouble." But Mortimer kept his counsel, and did not inform his son of his acquaintance with the colonel.

"For," he reflected, "if Phil makes good running with the daughter, the old chap, pride and all, may be squared."

With money enough and enough resolution there were, he considered, few crooked situations in life which could not be "squared." He had so often squared others and been squared himself that his faith in the process was boundless.

Many years before Mortimer had been one of a

little circle of adventurers who had founded a club where gentlemen could play cards as well as sup sumptuously. He had also lent money across the card-table at startling rates of interest to gentlemen in sudden need of it. Among the victims had been young Madryn, who had "been very nasty" before paying £800 in cash for an advance of £500 in counters. Mortimer Gordon had not forgotten this incident, though it was now more than thirty years old, nor could he be sure how the memory of it might affect the colonel's dealings with his son.

The club had been raided by the police the year following the transaction, after Mortimer had ceased to be associated with it.

When he saw "the swells tailing off and the 'wrong sort' coming in" he quietly removed to safer pasture grounds.

But the matter was one which he was most anxious to keep from the knowledge of his son. For so great is the cult of the respectable on character that parental responsibilities were exercising an effect on Mortimer which it is scarcely an exaggeration to describe as purifying. The fact that his son wished to marry the daughter of a man who had once called him a "leg" made the old man somewhat pensive. Of course the business had seemed fair enough to Mr. Gordon's turf-ethics at the time, but morals are matters of social evolution; we gather increasing respect for them as we ascend! At all events, as "a man of property" Mortimer was now

conscious of those darker shades in conduct of which as an adventurer he had been oblivious.

It was, moreover, to his mind, "a mug's game to kick up a fuss because another chap's bested you at cards or on the turf." Besides, he knew every one has his own crop of business wild-oats to sow, and considered that such dealings as those between himself and Colonel Madryn ought to be overlooked in the case of men, who, having become wealthy, have naturally acquired a reputation for average commercial honesty. "Sunday-school morals," he thought, "were all very well," so long as practised in the proper place; but "men of the world" of his calibre were obviously outside their petty scope. To apply them to the conduct of "gallant sportsmen" was too a ridiculous piece of pedantry.

"Phil," he reflected, "was to meet the colonel at lunch on Sunday; if he wasn't wanted he wouldn't be invited."

The lunch which Philip Gordon had anticipated rather as a solemn rite in a mystic ceremonial than a meal eaten in another man's house, was in reality simple and unemotional, differing in no marked degree from unnumbered proceeding midday repasts.

The servant said, "Hock or claret, sir?" and he could not remember on the following day whether he had eaten beef or mutton.

The joy-provoking elements were wanting. They flourished with difficulty under the colonel's white

moustache and aquiline nose, especially when his old friend, Lady Overal, helped dispel them. Sunday in London always depressed Colonel Madryn, chiefly because he went to church and kept away from the club. The stagnation of the hour spurred his pessimism into activity, driving him to comparisons. How different from Sunday in June at Pentash! There he sat in an ancient church, the living of which was his gift, surrounded by ancestral urns and tablets. Outside, through the open door, in the little churchyard he heard the bees humming over the waving grass. All the drowsy whispers of the place brought him a sense of peace and importance. Then across the old graves he saw in his mind's eye the path leading to his private gate, then in procession came the gardens, the greenhouses, the dappled park, and the black rooks in the elm-tops against blue skies.

Naturally a silent man, he talked little at lunch ; but when the conversation touched on some current political question, he doubted the collective wisdom of democracies.

"A democracy with a noisy press and time-serving politicians," he observed to Lady Overal, "would ruin the strongest empire in the world."

Lady Overal, widow of a late Indian lieutenant-governor, agreed with him.

"When," she said, "the government of a country such as this passes from the hands of its natural rulers its decline has commenced."

"Who are its natural rulers?" Constance Madryn inquired.

"The landed aristocracy, my dear," replied Lady Overal.

Constance Madryn, Philip noticed, smiled slightly.

"Evidently," he said to himself, "she thinks Cassandra is talking nonsense," for he was not a landed proprietor and he felt pleased.

"And may I ask what you think, Mr. Gordon?" resumed Lady Overal, turning to him. "I often wonder what the younger men think of the present state of things?"

"I think," he replied, "that we look forward rather than back. The world's changing so fast that even democracies are learning the necessity of discipline. Perhaps the administrators of the future will be trained for their duties. It is a popular theory that the amateur's day is over and that governing, like mathematics, is a subject of which we may all learn a little."

Lady Overal shook her head.

"Government," she said, "is an instinct. It can never be learnt, and ought to remain the prerogative of the classes from whose hands it is slipping.

Constance Madryn, who had heard Lady Overal repeat this sentiment many times, looked faintly bored, and the subject dropped from its own weight. Philip's little speech, however, had roused Colonel Madryn's attention.

"I was wondering, Mr. Gordon," he said, "whether you were related to my old friend, Sir Percival Gordon, who commanded the 30th Dragoon Guards? Oddly enough, he was a sort of Radical too."

As he had walked across the Park to Rutland Square, Philip had told himself that the Madryns would not have asked him to lunch "unless they had known all about him." Elmsley's gossip, he suspected, had made his path clear. Most young men set sufficient value on their merits as social assets, and Philip had hoped his Oxford record and personal advantages had won him a welcome with the Madryns of Pentash in spite of antecedents with which he thought amiable and cultivated people never confronted the innocent inheritors. But the colonel's question made it clear that he had no idea of his guest's identity. He suspected, too, that Constance Madryn glanced at him strangely as he replied that he was not related to Sir Percival Gordon, and that if he were a Radical it was without being conscious of the fact.

"You are like me, Mr. Gordon," she said. "I go to sleep on Sunday, an unconscious Radical, and wake up on Monday, in consequence of Lady Overal's influence, an enlightened Tory Imperialist. There is nothing more difficult to cling to in these bewildering days than a fixed opinion."

"We run round and round them till we become quite giddy," said Philip.

"That is true," said the colonel, "thanks to



our incorrigible cheap press. Ignorant newspaper criticism is the greatest of modern dangers."

This was not the least like the conversation Philip had expected. He even detected in Constance Madryn a veiled inclination to deride the opinion of her father. This suspected spirit of satire, however, only made her more dazzling, and gave him an excuse for secretly sighing, "Oh! how wonderfully clever!"

After lunch the colonel invited Philip to smoke in his study. The young man would have much preferred the drawing-room and Constance Madryn, but he was desirous of acquiring her father's esteem above that of all men in the world; so he lit the cigar which was offered him and sat down resignedly, wondering what on earth he should say.

Fortunately the colonel's courtesy had glided into friendliness. He had an old soldier's admiration for handsome, stalwart, well-mannered youths when they were unaggressive, and his guest had none of the characteristics which displeased him; he pitched his voice in a pleasant key and was free from the fidgety self-assertiveness which the colonel discovered in most young men. A point of common interest, too, revealed itself in the Dean of Brazenknob, by whom Philip, when at college, had been occasionally honoured by an invitation to breakfast. The colonel had some acquaintance with the illustrious don whom he respected as "an eccentric scholar," and he was interested to learn

that Philip considered him not only the finest Greek scholar in Europe but a man possessing an extraordinary faculty for reading character.

"A great gift, Mr. Gordon," said the colonel, who erroneously believed that he shared it. "Did the dean ever express any opinion concerning you? Excuse me asking you, but the faculty you describe is rare and one always has one's own ideas of one's friends."

The young man blushed, delighted at so much evidence of interest in Her father.

"The dean told me just before I went down, when I called upon him to say good-bye, that he scarcely expected to hear my name mentioned again. When I asked why, he said, 'Apparently you belong to the prosperous type, and members of this college who do, Mr. Gordon, disappear like the ghosts in Virgil.'"

The colonel was amused. He remembered, moreover, how the ghosts in Virgil behaved. It was his theory that the whole country, excepting the decaying landed gentry, was soddened with too much easy prosperity, and here was a distinguished Oxford don apparently holding similar views.

"And did you question this somewhat melancholy prediction, Mr. Gordon?" he inquired.

"I felt rather small," replied Philip, "and I said I hoped my small dose of prosperity hadn't stifled all my ambition. He said he hoped not too, but that I mustn't imagine a First in Mods and a

second in Greats, were 'honours' to conjure with. 'You're not going into the Church, Mr. Gordon,' he went on, looking at me critically under his shaggy eyebrows,—I daresay you remember his eyebrows, 'and you are about to pretend to "go in" for the Law. Well, unless Fortune kicks you to the grindstone you may as well bury yourself at once' (the dean's a great admirer of Carlyle) 'under the "fat things which the devil prepares for his elect" and give up the game without further fuss.' 'Suppose Fortune does kick me hard enough, sir,' I answered, 'will you give me another chance then?' 'In that case,' he said, 'there will be some hope of you.'"

Just as Philip finished his story the servant showed a tall, dark man, several years his senior, into the study.

"How do you do, colonel?" said the new-comer. "I only returned to town late last night."

"Mr. Gordon, Mr. Drayton," said the colonel.

The two men exchanged the curtailed signs of greeting common to young Englishmen at an introduction which neither desires.

"The ladies upstairs, colonel?" asked Drayton. "If so, I'll go up and make my salaams."

"I see you have finished your cigar, Mr. Gordon, so we'll all go up," said the colonel. "You lead the way, Drayton."

The colonel left them at the drawing-room, where Miss Madryn and her niece were sitting reading

at remote ends of the room, Lady Overall having disappeared.

"Ah, Frank," said Miss Madryn, when they appeared, "so you are back at last?"

"Yes," said Drayton; "came back last night."

Philip noticed that Constance Madryn's reception of Mr. Drayton was colder than her aunt's, for after they had shaken hands she turned to him and said:

"I want to show you some Swiss views that will interest you, Mr. Gordon."

Then, whilst Drayton sat down by her aunt, she proceeded to turn over the pages of a large album of views that stood on a small table near the window.

Did Mr. Gordon remember that? Yes, it was Madame Bard's house. You could see the wall with the roses clambering over it. And that was the Duchess's Tower; that the quay where they had taken the boats the day of the picnic; just behind, on that slope of the hills, was the villa where the Miss Bassetts used to live. Did he remember?

Philip remembered everything, and would have been happy, but he was conscious of some malicious comedy stirring in the air which he did not follow. Why was Drayton in a bad temper—not well concealed and visible in little jets? Instead of listening to Miss Madryn Philip perceived that he was following his conversation with her niece. An icy suspicion that he was being used to annoy Drayton

made itself felt. The latent trouble stirring about him hastened his departure.

"I was afraid my Swiss views would be too much for you," said Constance with a suspicion of reproach in her voice, when he said he must go.

"Stupid things, views!" said Drayton, "even when you don't take them yourself."

But she looked straight in Philip's face ignoring Drayton's querulous comment.

"Remember, we are always 'at home' on Wednesdays, Mr. Gordon," she added, as he was leaving the room.

Miss Madryn accompanied him to the landing. It was time, she thought, to warn him.

"They are such old friends," she said, "and they've had a misunderstanding. I'm afraid you noticed something."

"I did think something was—er—up," he replied awkwardly.

"No wonder! Frank is irritable and Connie satirical. But there is my brother. Good-bye, Mr. Gordon, we shall always be pleased to see you."

The colonel was at the bottom of the stairs.

"So you're off, Mr. Gordon," he said. "I'll walk to the end of the Square with you."

They stepped out on the white steps shining in the afternoon sun. Three stunted youths smoking cigarettes were strolling by, talking loudly.

"There is only one remedy for that," said the colonel,—“the drill-sergeant.”

"I believe the country would accept the drill-sergeant if he were properly offered," answered Philip, who was wondering what Drayton was saying in the drawing-room, for a man does not run against his rival for nothing.

"In their present mood, sir, the British public won't accept anything unpleasant," said the colonel. "It has been too fed up on 'the fat things' of which your friend the dean spoke."

"I'm a pretty useless fellow myself," thought the now desponding Philip.

They crossed the Square to the north side, whence the trees of the Park and the variegated traffic of a great thoroughfare could be seen.

"I'm glad they are doing up that house at last," said the colonel. "Rutland Square is not a cheerful spot at the best of times. That house has stood as a warning to speculators for years. The man who lived there was ruined on the Stock Exchange."

Philip glanced at the house. The front had been painted ; ladders and scaffolding awaited to-morrow's workmen.

"No. 49!" exclaimed Philip. "How odd! That is the house which has just come into my father's hands."

"How extraordinary!" said the colonel. "Perhaps we shall be neighbours then." He was too polite, however, to ask any questions, so he consumed his surprise and they separated, the colonel letting

himself into the Square by the gate with his key and Philip Gordon returning to his rooms.

Glancing across the Square he could see Constance Madryn standing on the balcony.

What did quarrels of this kind mean?

The danger threatening the lover's prospects dragged him from the realm of dreams into action.

## CHAPTER VIII

ON Monday morning old Gordon appeared in his son's room. He was in a sanguine mood, but saw by the young man's harassed face how he was wrestling with doubts. For once he tried to step over the confines of bluffness into the narrower paths of tact, where he was not at home.

"If you want backing, Phil," said he, "I'm your man. But if you'd rather not talk o' your private love-affairs, with which no man has right to interfere, I'll just wait outside and wish you luck."

"You're the only man in the world who can help me," replied his son.

Then he told him, whilst old Mortimer listened grimly. When he had heard all Philip had to say he summed up thus :

"I take it, this is how matters stand. The colonel seems reasonable. The obstacle's not there—at least, it needn't be. The danger comes from that other chap, Drayton. You say the girl's playing him off against you, Phil——"

"I said nothing of the kind!" the young man interrupted indignantly.



But for once the old man was patient, and humoured the sufferer.

"O' course you didn't," he acquiesced. "I'm only a stupid old man; but girls do these things without knowing it. It's part of their cleverness. Why, didn't Eve play off Old Nick against Adam? Nature's nature all over, and where a girl has to deal with two chaps, she can't help manœuvrin'. I don't blame 'em. Now you take my tip! In love and fightin' pluck and weight win. Miss Madryn prefers you; the other chap doesn't seem able to make up his mind, so just you cut in while he's hesitatin'. I know women, my lad. You ain't a bad catch. Look here! we'll go shares. I'll settle £30,000 on Miss Madryn, and make you an allowance of £3,000. When I'm bowled out, and my little game's up, you know, you get everything; an' I don't suppose I'll live for ever, Phil."

The young man was so deeply touched by his father's generosity, and expressed gratitude so charmingly, that Mortimer imagined that he too must be a gentleman. But Philip felt he was falling from the blue heights to the practical, vulgar levels, and the descent was painful; yet he knew he could not exist constantly in the rarefied region whither the emotions had swept him, and so clutched at all the material encouragements which he could find.

"I don't deserve half you're doing for me!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, you do, Phil," his father replied. 'I want

her as Mary and desired that she should visit him at least once a year.

To this august feast she invited Philip Gordon. She was giving a little dance on Wednesday. Miss Madryn and her niece were coming, would Mr. Gordon overlook the shortness of the invitation and come too?

Now Mr. Drayton had previously declined this honour, and she desired that his temerity might be punished by the encouragement of his rival.

When old Gordon, who knew all about the ducal connection, saw Lady Overal's invitation his altruistic pride swelled till it gave a deeper bloom to his ruddy complexion. Evidently the swells intended to honour Phil! And he wondered what share in it was due to his money.

But the intervening days were over at last, and on Thursday at ten o'clock Philip, arrayed as correctly as his own taste, the tailor's skill, and a handsome figure permitted, was waiting for the arrival of the Madryns in Lady Overal's reception-room.

"So glad you could come, Mr. Gordon," said Lady Overal encouragingly. "Miss Madryn—Connie, I mean—will be delighted."

This was as a propitious whisper. When Constance Madryn arrived, in the youth's fond eyes shining like a white vestal, and greeted him with a pleased smile, all his hopes rose.

But our most terrible overthrows are prepared in the silences like the thunderstorms, and there was

no signal to stop him from rushing on his humiliation. He never remembered what led up to it—a kindly gleam in her clear eyes, a softer inflection in her voice, or it may have been the heavy scent of the roses near the window where they stood overlooking the trees of the Park and the murmurs of the night.

"They smell like the roses on Madame Bard's garden wall," she said musingly, and so the train was fired.

"I shall smell them all my life, Miss Madryn," he said. "They grow in my dreams—fragrant hopes, lighting up all the dark places."

What had happened?

She turned to him in wonder at this flight, and saw the meaning in his earnest face.

"Don't say any more, please, Mr. Gordon," she said nervously.

"I must," he replied, and then some other voice than his own said for him, "I must! for I love you."

And before she could stop him he had rushed off the smooth rails of conventional speech.

"You must hear me! Ever since you looked down on me that day in the garden, and I saw your hair shining in the sun, I have loved you. Forgive me! I'm not worthy of you except in the depth of my love."

But her look stopped him, whilst his heart swung in a strange panic.

"I must not hear you," she said. "I've no right to—it's too late. I wanted you to be a friend, for

you seemed an old one; but I never meant you to misunderstand. I'm so sorry!"

"Why is it too late?" he asked, calling, it seemed, from the base of an icy cliff to her shining in the sunshine above.

Then as she looked at him her conscience, not wholly guiltless, stung her.

"Because," she answered, "I am engaged to Mr. Drayton."

All the little bells in his blood jangled in discord; the sense of youth shrank.

"Since when?" he said.

"Since yesterday," she answered. "Forgive me, Mr. Gordon. I'm very sorry. Let us go back to the drawing-room."

There another partner claimed her, but Gordon waited in the crowd by the door till the dance was over, and then, glancing at him not as a triumphant mistress but a sad friend, she left her partner, defied the conventions, and came straight to him. Her voice reached his ear through the valse music which filled the room.

"Forgive me!" she said. "I'm not worth being unhappy about. Go into the world and work like a man, and then some day I shall be proud that you once thought of me."

The pity in her voice soothed him.

"There is nothing to forgive. I was a fool. I ought not to have spoken. Still, I am glad I loved you for I shall never love any one else."

The thrills of the violins seemed coiling like unseen snakes round the room, now full of dancers.

"Good-bye," he said.

She held out her hand.

"Good-bye," said she.

He pressed it a moment, and a few moments later was in the street under the stars, hedged in by the rows of lights stretching to Piccadilly.

The clock struck twelve when he switched on the electric light in his room, and sat down and looked at the wall.

Meanwhile, with still greater recklessness, his father, busied in what he conceived to be the interests of his son, had been rushing on a worse overthrow. Mortimer, who had not consulted his son, desired to prepare him a triumphant surprise. The colonel, he reflected, must hear who he was ; it was better, therefore, that the enlightenment should come from himself. Besides,—for Phil was squeamish,—full weight would not be given to their financial position unless he took a resolute part in the negotiations.

He dined with his son before the latter started for the ball, and then, hailing a hansom, drove to Rutland Square, getting out at the corner to reconnoitre.

A brougham was standing before Colonel Madryn's door. He waited until he saw two ladies in evening dress enter it and drive away. Then he rang the bell and asked for Colonel Madryn with an air of authority.

The servant glanced in surprise at old Mortimer,

who, in a fawn-coloured summer coat over evening dress, looked floridly prosperous and unlike the more subdued military gentlemen who occasionally dropped in uninvited on the colonel.

"Who shall I say, sir?" inquired the man.

Mortimer produced his card and was shown into the little room behind the dining-room.

"Thinks I'm come on business," he reflected, faintly annoyed that he had not been taken at once to a reception-room. Still, he found comfort from his surroundings. The carpet and furniture, he noted, were old and worn, and he thought complacently of his one hundred thousand pounds' bid. Evidently "it wouldn't be sneezed at here."

Encouraged by this thought he sat down calmly and waited.

Meanwhile, in the drawing-room above, the colonel was studying the card on which, in the place of honour, was printed—"Mr. Mortimer Gordon." In the right hand corner appeared the legend, "Highcroft Grange, Highcroft, Surrey"; in the left, "Junior Sporting Club." It was not a card to conjure with.

"What's he like?" asked the colonel.

"Portly gentleman, sir; never seen him before," replied the man.

Then it occurred to the colonel that his visitor might be some relative of Philip Gordon, and he went downstairs to receive him.

Mortimer rose as he entered the room, displayed himself genially, and addressed him in his best manner.

"Dessay you won't remember me, colonel, but you know my boy Phil."

"Pray sit down, Mr. Gordon," said the colonel, quite uncharmed.

Here Mortimer decided to tell the colonel what he wanted before admitting who he was.

"I'll come to the point at once, colonel," he said, "with your leave."

"Certainly," replied the other stiffly.

"It's about my boy and your girl," resumed Gordon ; "my boy Phil, yer know. Phil's no idea that I'm interferin', but it's more straightforward. I want you to consent to his paying his addresses to Miss Madryn—fact is, I'm afraid the rogue's begun that already ; you know what the young 'uns are, colonel ! —but to prevent mistakes I thought it more above board to come to you and say what I'm prepared to do."

The colonel was too much taken by surprise to interrupt, and his memory was trying to fix the shadowy resemblance that sat on Mortimer's shoulders and lurked in his gruff voice.

The old man resumed :

"Phil's badly smitten with your girl, colonel. It seems they met years ago abroad, and the lad's never forgotten. He's a fine fellow, and a gentleman—as any father might be proud of. Well, to make a long story short, if you consent to a match between 'em, why ! I'll settle £30,000 on your daughter and allow Phil £3,000 a year. That's my offer ! Now I'm a

warm man, colonel, a good deal warmer than many of my old pals think, and when I'm gone, Phil 'ill have everything—a little matter of £250,000, I reckon."

But the shadowy likeness was growing clear and Colonel Madryn stern. In any case he considered this plebeian was taking an infernal liberty.

"Just now, Mr.—em—Gordon, is it?—you suggested we had met before. I think I remember where, and have a most unpleasant recollection of the meeting."

Mortimer looked at him without flinching.

"It was a matter of thirty-five years ago," said he.

"It was thirty-six years ago. The year my father died. He paid your claim, Mr. Alf Harris!"

"We were both a bit wild in those days," said Mortimer argumentatively; "both of us, I take it, with an av'rage amount of wild-oats to sow."

"Yours took the form of a gambling-hell and the ring, Mr.—er—Harris."

"Mortimer Gordon's my name, and always has been, although I did choose to race under another."

"It was my misfortune, then, Mr. Gordon, only to meet you in your professional capacity. However, we need not quarrel about that. I must now decline the honour of the alliance with your family which you offer me; I shall also request my daughter to break off all relations with your son. If we had known that the gentleman who shone on the turf thirty years ago as Alf Harris had been his father



these relations would never have been formed. I don't think we need prolong this interview further."

If he had followed his natural inclinations the savage old man would have flung himself at the colonel's throat, but he had been abused before and had learnt self-restraint.

He rose from his chair and looked the haughty old soldier in the eyes.

"If they had told me you'd behave like this," he said with unshaken voice, "I wouldn't have believed 'em. I won your money like a sportsman; you lost it like a mug. Once a mug, always a mug, or you wouldn't chuck the best offer you're ever likely to have for your daughter."

He finished his sentence to the colonel's back, who walked into the passage and rang the call-bell.

"Show this gentleman out," he said to the servant.

Mortimer glared wickedly at the colonel, who met his look with eyes full of perfectly natural contempt, and walked out of the front-door, which the man quietly closed behind him.

On his way to his hotel in Jermyn Street, however, old Gordon under his breath swore as he had not sworn in the days of his prosperity.

"The old——" he said, "I'll be even with him yet!"

And he began to wonder how.

## CHAPTER IX

MORTIMER GORDON got up on the following morning in an irritable state of mind. He had, he firmly believed, in consequence of his increasing prosperity, acquired in the world a position entitling him to extreme respect. This sense of his own importance had, moreover, been flattered by that little band of intelligent sycophants always found among the camp-followers of men who, having started from dubious beginnings, are visibly growing rich. But he had just been brought into violent collision with a different ideal of conduct, most contemptuously expressed, and the shock had left him sore and savage. He had, too, sought comfort in whiskey insufficiently diluted with seltzer-water, and took no pleasure in his fried bacon, which he cursed for not being crisp. The art of curing and frying bacon he swore was a lost one, "like the manners o' the aristocracy." The waiter at Potts's, an old friend, was sympathetic; the decadence of bacon was, he thought, due to "the Germans"; for the deterioration of the upper classes he accounted by the baneful influence of "those ha'penny papers"; he also recommended a liqueur glass of

old cognac and "a small soda" as a "pick-me-up"—a remedy Mortimer ungraciously accepted. It proved effective, however, for he smiled grimly at himself in the mirror of the coffee-room and said:

"Lord! how I *am* goin' on! There ain't any sense in it." Then in a cunning mood he started to see his son.

Now old Gordon shied at Alf Harris. The spectre opened the door into the ugly period when he was neither prosperous nor respectable. Moreover, the feeling that he had not had the best of it was another reason for saying nothing about his interview with Colonel Madryn unless Philip, hearing of it from Miss Madryn, should question him. His energetic, pugnacious temperament sought to cover defeat by fresh aggression.

"Why shouldn't the lad run off with the girl?" he wondered. Didn't Billie Hales, who was little better than a bookie, in spite of the militia, run off with Bella Polton, Sir Kenneth Polton's only daughter? It was true old Polton had made his money in beer, but then he was twenty times as rich, and nearly as stuck up, as Madryn of Pentash. And you couldn't compare Billie Hales with Phil. They weren't in the same class, not they!

What a slap in the face it would be for the colonel—no d——d settlements in that case, but every one laughing! He fancied himself ironically sympathising with the man who had shown him the door.

"You should 'a' listened to me, colonel," he heard himself saying, "then things would 'a' been comfortable. I forgive 'im, of course, but I'm afraid the young lady won't get her settlement unless, of course, you're able to stump up."

He went through the imaginary interview with his enemy, trampling on his pride. As he walked along Piccadilly in the morning sunshine such a dramatic end to the quarrel seemed not impossible. For a girl won't be prevented from marrying a chap like Phil by an old fool of a father, especially when the chap's got money, and Phil should have all he wanted.

"We'll do the old mug yet!"

With these uncharitable thoughts striving to soothe his wounded pride, Mortimer Gordon walked into his son's room.

"Well, Phil! How did you get on last night?"

"It's all over, sir. The thing's done, finished, and will have to be forgotten."

"Won't she have you, then?"

"I was too late. Miss Madryn is engaged to Mr. Drayton."

Then old Gordon exploded, cursing the Madryns, father and daughter, with all the energy of a natural and well-trained taste in blasphemy.

"Silence, sir!" exclaimed his son. "You don't know what you are saying. I have no reason to complain. It was my luck to speak too late. As for her father, he treated me fairly, like a gentleman."

"What the h—— do you intend?" shouted his father. "To sit down under it, and let another fellow cut you out? You've been d——d badly treated. Why don't you take it out o' the Madryns by giving Drayton a lickin'? That's what I shud 'a' done at your age. What do you intend to do?—that's what I want to know."

"I intend to work and to forget it, if I can," replied his son. And something in his manner pulled back the old man to reason.

"I cannot see, sir," the young man continued, "why you should be aggrieved."

Mortimer hesitated. He had been on the point, as he would have called it, of "giving his show away," but it was now unnecessary to tell his son of "the colonel's infernal impertinence."

"Who said I was aggrieved?" he asked sullenly. "You don't suppose I like to see a d——d stuck-up minx 'chuck' me son, do you?"

"No, and I'm grateful to you, sir. But your violence isn't pleasant to see, and Colonel Madryn is blameless in the matter. The mistake's mine. Swear at me if you like, but do leave the Madryns alone!"

Finding himself in a situation in which he could not relieve his feelings by strong language without disclosing his private reason for his ferocity, Mortimer condensed his hostile energies into an ugly frown, and admitted "it wasn't no good bawlin'," wondering, as he looked at his son, at the difference between

them. Phil, he supposed, belonged to the new school, which thought it bad form to kick up a row. But how deuced quietly he was taking it!

Gradually the old man was recovering his temper.

"Never mind, old chap," he said, after a long silence, "you shall marry a better girl than one o' that Madryn lot—as poor as sparrows an' as proud as cock pheasants. I'm at your back still, Phil!"

"Thank you," said his son bitterly, "but I'm told there are other interests in life besides the purely domestic ones. Marriage isn't usually considered absolutely essential to happiness."

The infusion of mockery in his son's words refreshed old Mortimer.

"Of course it ain't, Phil, and you've plenty o' time to think of it. Marriage be blowed for the present! You said somethin' about work just now. The law, did you mean? It's a dev'lish nice trade, and has taken many a clever chap far before now."

"I was thinking of the law," said his son. "The fact is, I'm tired of dawdling."

Mortimer was impressed. He would have been satisfied if his son had decided to discharge the purely ornamental functions of the well-provided-for young man, and even have worn him as a feather in his own cap as evidence of what his estate could afford, but his nature was too combative to be wholly content with mild triumphs. Plenty of other self-made men were supporting in idleness hand-

some, amiable, and fairly accomplished sons for the mere honour of the thing.

"Phil needn't do anything if he doesn't like," he told his friends; "but, mind you, he will. He's got my grit with all his quiet manners."

The very highest compliment that old Gordon could pay a man was to give him his "grit"—with him a majestic, cloud-compelling quality.

"No chap," he thought, "ought to sit down and feel satisfied. You want something thicker than a straw to chew." He would have held a higher opinion of the character of the leopard which added to its spots, and secretly expected his son to become Lord Chancellor.

"There's nothing like the law, Phil," he said; "you stick to that. I've brought the family so far, you see how much further you can take it—and blow the hussies! that's what I say."

And a little later Philip went down to the Temple to his interrupted law studies, whilst his father left town for Highcroft Grange and his thorough-breds.

But meanwhile Colonel Madryn had not been unruffled by the discovery that young Gordon was Alf Harris's son. It struck him as one more proof of these vulgar, levelling times that the son of a confounded "leg" should find a way into a gentleman's house and make love to his daughter.

Unable to go to bed with this weight on his mind, the colonel sat up for his sister and daughter to express his views on this painful subject.

It was nearly two o'clock when he confronted them in the dining-room over the sandwiches and decanters.

"What on earth are you up for?" wondered Miss Madryn.

"Because I happen to have had a most unpleasant shock, Louisa," her brother replied.

And then she perceived that he was deeply annoyed.

"I had a visitor this evening, soon after you left," he resumed severely, standing bolt upright and addressing the ladies, "from a person styling himself Mortimer Gordon, but whose acquaintance I was unlucky to make as Alf Harris. I was a very young man then and he was what we used to call a 'leg.' He 'did' most of the young idiots who had dealings with him—myself among the number."

The ladies listened in astonishment. Constance Madryn turned pale.

What did Philip Gordon mean by allowing his dreadful father to call on hers?

"What did he want?" asked Miss Madryn, during the pause which her brother made to enable them to grasp the full significance of the offence committed against the dignity of his house.

"It appears," he resumed, now addressing his daughter, "that Alf Harris, *alias* Mortimer Gordon, is wealthy—many unscrupulous knaves are—and that his son, whom your aunt was foolish enough to introduce into my house——"



"How could I have possibly known!" gasped his sister. "Be just, Charles!"

"——was foolish enough to introduce into my house," repeated the colonel implacably, "has formed an attachment for you, Constance, of which I understand that you are aware. This—this person," continued the colonel, as though staggering under the weight of his own contempt, "made me an offer for you for his son! The wretched vulgarian described himself as 'a warm man' and talked of settlements and of hundreds of thousands of pounds as though they were five-pound notes. However, I daresay this flourish is merely what he would call 'a plant.' At all events I declined the preposterous alliance in terms which even Mr. Alf Harris is unlikely to forget, and he left the house after firing a round of abuse at—my back."

Here the colonel stopped and watched the effect of his words on his daughter's face. It bore an anxious look, but she suppressed her agitation. Her chief feeling was one of pity for Philip Gordon.

"I knew that Philip Gordon was unfortunate in his father—my cousin, Willie Elmsley, told me something of that; but I never knew it was so bad as you describe. Willie was at school and college with Philip Gordon and has the highest opinion of him."

"Willie Elmsley has behaved ill in allowing you to be intimate with the son of such a man, and I will tell him so," said the colonel "You will

now understand, Constance, that it is my wish that you have no further communication with this unlucky young man, for to have Alf Harris for one's father is a disaster which I could not endure with equanimity if it befell my worst enemy."

This little ironical outburst so relieved the colonel's feelings that he repeated it.

"Philip Gordon," replied his daughter, "is not responsible for his father; but I shall not see him again. He knows that I am engaged to Mr. Drayton——"

There was another surprise for the colonel.

"Why was I not told of this sooner?" he inquired indignantly but secretly relieved.

"Mr. Drayton will see you to-morrow at twelve o'clock," said his daughter. "He wished me not to speak to you before he had an opportunity of doing so himself."

"Constance consulted me, Charles," said Miss Madryn, "and I told her that I saw no objection. Mr. Drayton has irreproachable family connections—in fact, is all we can wish for Constance. The match, from every point of view, is a desirable one. As for this unpleasant business with young Philip Gordon's father, I am exceedingly sorry you should have been annoyed, but the thing isn't safe to talk about. If the Square were to hear that a person of this character had made you an offer for Constance, the gossip would be intolerable. I am sorry, for I liked the young man, who seemed quite

gentlemanly. But, Constance, dear, you look tired out; do go to bed at once. Your father has said all he wishes to say."

Constance Madryn went to her room feeling as one who has played in a half-ridiculous and half-pathetic comedy where the sentiment has been sacrificed with a liberal hand.

"She doesn't care for him, does she?" asked the colonel of his sister when his daughter had gone.

"For whom?" replied his sister, thinking of several things at once.

"For this young Gordon, of course," said her brother testily.

"What an idea!" replied Miss Madryn boldly. "Of course she is fond of Frank Drayton."

"Constance never told us that the young fellow's father was impossible," replied the colonel thoughtfully, suspecting something behind which he had not entirely grasped.

Miss Madryn that night discussed her niece's engagement from most points of view, but she forgot that Philip Gordon had been made the unconscious means of hurrying Mr. Drayton to a decision. Miss Madryn had a full share of the delicate cunning of her sex. Secure, as he fancied, in the position which a large income gave him, Drayton had seemed a somewhat sluggish lover, whose jealous apprehensions needed rousing. Philip Gordon had arrived at the convenient moment for applying the stimulus.

Miss Madryn's move may have been sub-conscious, as many of our most selfish motives are, but now that her wishes were realised she was anxious to believe, as a right-minded woman, that what had occurred was entirely due to the will of Providence unaided.

## CHAPTER X

A DISAPPOINTMENT, in which all the finer aspirations are submerged, leaves permanent traces on the character over which it has swept. Weak minds are enfeebled, those of stronger fibre strengthened. The strong want the truth, and whenever they are knocked off the perch of complacent hope, where in youth they trustingly alight, their downfall is accepted as an extension of experience in unexpected directions, not as a malign departure from the accustomed course of events. With most defeats but especially with those of the affections, self-respect loses some of its first bloom. This loss vigorous natures set to work at once to repair. Outside the mysterious personal limit lies the roaring world of men, where will, weight, and intellect adroitly applied pick up prizes. Into this young Gordon pushed his way, with the same resolution that his father had exhibited thirty years before in less worthy arenas of human activity. Old Gordon had worked his way to wealth by underground paths, starting from the turf; his son hoped to rise to some honour and reputation by the study and practice of the law.

The law, as a serious rather than a decorative

pursuit, may be made an excellent anodyne for disasters suffered in the realm of the emotions. "The pangs of despised love" assume a position more in perspective with other human woes and interests when the sufferer can survey them through the enlightening influence of a respectable acquaintance with Roman and English law. In the undisturbed intellectual atmosphere, where values are not exaggerated, the all-absorbing sex-questions which baffle the literature of the imagination find their lowest temperatures.

In his legal studies Philip Gordon met with a good fortune not awarded him in the adventures of the heart. Chance took him to the chambers of the great Mr. Locksley, now a famous politician and a light of cabinets, whose favourite and most promising pupil he became. When Philip went up to Brazenknob, Locksley, full of University honours, was in his last term. An acquaintance was formed between them on the cricket-field. Locksley's weakness was to imagine himself a serious player, and his faith in himself rather than his merits as a bat found him an occasional place in his college team. Of Gordon's cricket, however, there was no doubt. He got his Blue. Philip's batting dazzled Locksley; Locksley's intellectual attainments filled Philip with so much admiration that he even wondered "why on earth the man should want to shine in second-rate cricket."

The period which Philip passed as a pupil in the chambers of the already rising barrister ripened their

earlier acquaintance into a friendship which proved of the utmost value to the younger man.

Locksley was selfish, brilliant, and ambitious, but he respected and liked his pupil, who was the first to flatter him by a complete recognition of his powers. Locksley, who never praised anybody, and even thought meanly of the intelligence of respected judges, was once heard to say—"Gordon has brains!"

Meanwhile, old Mortimer, with beating drums and flying flags, moved into Rutland Square. The house was decorated, as the Square said, "regardless of expense"; a billiard-room was built, bow windows thrust forth florid protuberances—"give me lots o' light," said old Mortimer—and he purchased also every other convenience and luxury that upholstery can bestow.

Across the Square he pictured his enemy enviously surveying the vivid proofs of his prosperity.

Colonel Madryn did see them and, secretly offended, solaced himself by pretending that "Mr Alf Harris intended to apply for a licence for his house."

"Look at it, leering across the Square with its goggle-eyed bow windows!" he said to his sister. "He'll make a gin-palace of it, and call it the Leg's Arms."

A humorist of moderate originality, this conceit somewhat relieved the colonel's displeasure; but he never had the satisfaction of knowing that his gibe,

from constant repetition, finally reached the ear of Mortimer Gordon himself, who was not too proud to collect kitchen-gossip from his valet. Mortimer was so furious that he hurried off to consult Peter Davies.

"If that isn't libellous, Peter," he exclaimed, "I don't know what is! Can't I have the law on him?"

Davies had some trouble in inducing his combative client to hear reason.

"Wait till the colonel tells you so himself, Mortimer," said the lawyer, secretly amused.

"Tell me, indeed!" ejaculated Mortimer. "Why, I'd knock him down if he dared, even in the presence of Royalty itself." Mortimer had once been presented to a Royal personage by mistake at a horse show where he had won a prize; this had given him a standard of solemnity.

Occasionally the two enemies passed in the street, when the colonel's air of icy remoteness from Mr. Gordon's existence exasperated the latter, who nevertheless tried to imitate his foe's attitude of complete oblivion. Mortimer, on his side, used to relieve his mind by abusing his neighbour to his own particular friends, but to Philip he never mentioned the Madryns' name.

Philip, whose home was with his father, had also to submit to the averted gaze of the colonel and his sister; he accepted their stoniness without rancour, altogether ignorant of its real cause. When



the Gordons had been two years in the Square Philip felt himself ten years older.

"So you mean to stick to it, Phil?" said his father, soon after his son had been called to the Bar.

"Locksley has promised to do what he can," said Philip, "so there is some sort of chance."

"Like my boy's modesty to talk like that!" reflected his father, who admired in his son a quality denied to himself.

"That rising chap Locksley's got his eye on Phil," the vain old man bragged to his friends. "They're great pals. You know what that means. But I'll bet sixpence my boy's every bit as good as the other fellow."

When Mortimer took up his abode in the Square he considered himself heir to all its privileges. To make his claims visible he appeared regularly every Sunday in the tall-spired church and looked into his hat with as much resolution as though he had practised that religious observance ever since he had worn one.

"What the devil does he mean by coming here?" wondered the colonel, his fellow-worshipper.

"Don't be uncharitable!" exclaimed his sister, who had serious religious views. "Even a betting man may repent."

To raise his abode in Rutland Square to the becoming domestic level, Mortimer engaged Mrs. Wetherley-Scott, widow of the Rev. Wetherley-Scott

and a remote cousin of the Earl of Mulchester (on her mother's side), to superintend his household. The lady's age, her late husband's sacred calling, her excellent connections and unimpeachable character silenced the scandal which threatened to beat on Mortimer's well-varnished doors when first the Square discovered a lady seated in the place of honour. But gossip, which enters everywhere, still followed Mortimer Gordon.

It cannot be denied that he sometimes took his relaxations. It was not always easy to live up to the repentance which Miss Madryn had diagnosed. Mortimer admitted to his "pals" that he must have his "bit o' fun now an' then," but so long as he took it in regions suited for such diversions he was well aware that no one would complain.

One day Mr. Cone met Mortimer dining with a young, golden-haired lady at a well-known restaurant. Mr. Cone, who was unaccompanied by his wife, thrust himself into an introduction.

"Said she was his niece," he afterwards told his wife; "but she says she lives at Fulham."

"Cone ain't a bad sort," Mr. Gordon remarked, "but not quite what you call a gentleman."

This whisper about the niece went the usual round.

But in some mysterious manner, beyond the power of words to explain, the niece at Fulham was atoned for by Mrs. Wetherley-Scott in Rutland Square and by Mr. Gordon's name generously displayed among the vicar's pet charities. And so long as fair-haired

relatives did not, in the words of Mrs. Cone, "prance about the Square," she, Mrs. Parkington, and other liberal-minded ladies, were quite ready to dismiss such unworthy rumours, especially as they related to a widower.

If Mr. Mortimer Gordon was a man of bad character, the female portion of the Square with marriageable daughters argued, was it likely that Lord Mulchester would have permitted his relative, Mrs. Wetherley-Scott, to keep house for him?

Mrs. Parkington was especially charitable. She had, she confessed, no aristocratic prejudices, but she could not help saying that the Gordons had been badly treated by the Madryns who, after giving young Philip Gordon every encouragement before the daughter's marriage, had cut him when there was no further chance of profiting by the old gentleman's wealth. This she considered mean. No wonder his father—a rough old man, perhaps, but honest—went about saying things!

Mrs. Parkington took care that her disparaging views of the Madryns, in their most flattering shape, should reach Mortimer, who suddenly discovered that she was a deuced shrewd old woman.

There were, she told Mrs. Wetherley-Scott, worse things than marrying a poor man. No doubt Mr. Drayton was wealthy, but there was a strain of eccentricity in his family to which she would have been sorry to expose one of her own girls.

Philip heard these whispers, yet never spoke of

the Madryns. He was undergoing the hardening process and rapidly discovering that the values existing in the world were not those with which, as an undergraduate, he had made forecasts for his future.

## CHAPTER XI

LONG before Mrs. Drayton's son was two years old she began to make discoveries. In some marriages the surprises are disillusions. When a comely bachelor with many thousands a year is persuaded that a lady is "the perfection of good style" the chances are in favour of their marriage. Drayton knew that he was a "catch"; indeed, he made no effort to conceal a fact on which Society strongly insisted. His weakness, so far as women were concerned, was, he admitted, for "perfection in style." He was not, however, convinced that he had found this in Constance Madryn until Philip Gordon appeared as a possible rival. One day when some one had described young Gordon as "charming and clever," Constance assented, adding, "he was the nicest boy I ever knew!" Jealousy hurried admiration to a decision.

"It is the way she carries her head," Drayton thought, "and her voice."

A very dark man, his ideal woman was several shades fairer than Constance; but very fair women too often seemed underbred. On the whole, she was the nearest to what my Lord the Sultan

desired—a little cold, perhaps, but that might soon be cured ; and so he made up his mind and captured the bride.

“Frank,” said his mother, “has excellent qualities. He is most unselfish, but his temper’s peculiar, and he wants managing.”

High-spirited and clever women, however, are not always prepared by nature and training to suffer gladly husbands who have been systematically spoilt.

Frank Drayton had been brought up by a mother both weak and silly. Under any circumstances it is extremely difficult for a lad who is heir to great estates to find the level at which a true sense of his own demerit can modestly flourish. It is a popular belief that this discovery is made at our public schools. Young Drayton, however, was too well-protected by dulness and selfishness to reach this wholesome moral point. A capacity for games and sport only increased at Eton the comforting faith in his own natural superiority, whilst the fibre of his character was too tough to be much influenced by the delicate shades of culture which the traditional education of his class is supposed to bestow.

The polish which a metal takes is not necessarily a proof of its quality, sometimes it only conceals the flaws. It was quite possible to spend a week in the same house with Drayton without finding out that he was ignorant, sullen, and selfish, but it was impossible to be his wife without the melancholy enlightenment.

The husband on his side made discoveries too. He found that he had married a woman with ten times his brains, and a power of speech which other men admired as wit.

When Frank Drayton was stupid, pompous, or prejudiced, his wife laughed at him; but whenever she suggested that she thought him a fool he remembered it on the next day.

Around the happiest hearths the voice of criticism, when it does not flatter, is never heard.

Drayton had a house in Sloane Street which seemed almost to wink—so great was its pent-up cheerfulness—through eyebrows of red-brick at the passing traffic. Decorated up to the latest flutter of smart taste in upholstery, the walls whispered, "here the *bourgeois* spirit cannot enter: we are daring and decadent, measuring vice and virtue by standards of our own."

It is the fashion of the ends of all self-respecting centuries to pose, nor is the latest offspring of time behind his dead brothers.

Frank Drayton was riding with the rest on the wave, but his nerves were not unstrung to the right pitch, and instead of adopting an attitude, unaffectedly indulged his appetites.

Mrs. Drayton preferred 199, Sloane Street, to Rutland Square, over which the placid shadow of the mid-Victorian period hovered cloudily; but Frank seemed too black and big for the "fancies" of the reception-rooms. The contrast suggested to her

mind the absurd picture of a grenadier endeavouring to catch a butterfly under his bearskin.

This faculty for observing remote contrast, often satirical in character, is not a gift that endears a woman to a man whose sense of humour approximates to that of the comic advertisement.

Mr. Drayton's temperament seemed more suited to the square Italian architecture of Oakover House, which, built by his great-grandfather at the beginning of the century, suggested the solid comfort of a Pall Mall Club set down amid the oaks and beeches of the Sussex landscape.

It was not until the third year of their marriage, when the rumour that "the Draytons didn't get on" reached the gossips of Rutland Square, that their want of sympathy produced visible confusion.

Taste led the Draytons in different directions. She liked men and women "supposed to be clever," he preferred the easy-going, nicely dressed, commonplace people, whom he classified under the vacant phrase that they were "good sorts, don't you know."

That such a couple should clash was inevitable. One morning Drayton, after a late breakfast of soda-water-and-brandy and dry toast, walked into his library where his wife was writing letters.

He had played cards at his club till the small hours with the worst luck; moreover, too many strong cigars had also helped to make him disagreeable.

It was a beautiful June morning, but as he stood



at the window overlooking the street, where a smart hansom with flashing spokes was jingling by, he felt that vague sense of a nameless grievance which represents the unconscious homage paid by the extremest idleness of "the leisured classes" to all wholesome occupation.

There was nothing which he must do ; nothing that he desired to do. His wife, it seemed, ought to amuse him ; but she never had, he remembered, "laid herself out for that." Few married people, he suspected, did amuse each other. Marriage was an institution not a pastime.

In the flowers of the window-boxes two sparrows were lustily fighting ; he flicked at them with the newspaper which he carried, and they flew away.

"The little beasts peck the flowers all to pieces," he said. The remark, however, seemed to require no comment, for his wife went on writing. The scratching of her quill irritated him.

"Whom are you writing to ?" he asked abruptly.

"Mrs. Stewart."

"Which one ? I know three."

"Sybil Stewart."

"Oh, the wife of the beef-extract man."

"She has sent me a note asking me to lunch with her and go to Ranelagh," she replied.

His wife rang the bell and sat down again.

After a little pause he asked

"What's on ?"

"Polo, or something," she replied, folding her letter.

"Are you going?"

"Yes."

"You'll find a fine assortment of bounders of both sexes there. Can't stand the place myself. But women never mind."

He glanced at the columns of the paper. His wife handed the note to the servant waiting for it.

It seemed to Drayton that she was bored by his presence. As a matter of fact, she disliked the faint odour of the brandy and soda-water with which he had endeavoured to dispel the languor of the hour.

"Anything new?" she asked, for the sake of saying something.

"There's an odd case about a forged will," he answered. "A man you know is in it."

"Who?"

"Gordon."

"Philip Gordon?"

"Yes. Locksley, the rising counsel, is engaged in it too. He seems to have taken Gordon up, who is said to be clever."

"He always was," she answered, suddenly animated.

"No wonder! His father was a 'bookie.' Those common, shrewd old fellows are bound to have sharp sons. Cunning will out, you know."

"Isn't that rather a vulgar remark?" she asked.

"No; merely the naked truth. But I forgot

you were once one of his admirers, or that he was one of yours. I can't remember which."

Colonel Madryn had kept Mortimer Gordon's unfortunate visit from his son-in-law as an incident too undignified to be referred to, nor did Drayton suspect that Philip Gordon had once been, not without secret regrets, rejected by his wife. Strengthened by full knowledge he might have been unpleasant, but as it was she had sufficient scope for retort.

"Do you," she asked, "really imagine that it is necessary to have a successful plebeian for your father in order to be clever?"

"Not a bit of it, but it's an encouragement to cunning."

He was rather enjoying the wrangle because it annoyed his wife, and at least was something to do.

"Philip Gordon is the frankest man I ever knew," she answered.

"When a woman grows enthusiastic about a man's frankness, I know that he has been making love to her by his manner," said he.

"Your powers of observation are more startling than I suspected, then," she replied.

"The game's quite safe," he continued, "and usually considered innocent."

But it seemed ridiculous to quarrel, so she contented herself with supposing that he knew his own sex best.

"Of course I do, and yours too," he answered

crushingly. "All women look at life through blinkers."

"Let us hope the obscurity is good for us," she answered. "Perhaps if we saw it through veils, as they do in the East, our lords and masters would respect us quite as much."

"Only muzzles," he said irritably, "would prevent women from talking rot."

Then he walked out of the room, leaving the paper.

But this was only one of their many jarrings which a little deft flattery on her part might have averted.

"Frank's temper is unbearable," she thought, and the thought was a recurrent one.

Then she took up the *Times*, and read the account of an intricate will-case in which Philip Gordon had cross-examined an equivocating witness with a dexterity that had called forth a compliment from the judge.

This pleased her, for there was a soft place in her memory. She was glad to find her opinion of his promise justified by growing success.

But she was to lunch with Mrs. Stewart in Pont Street, and it was time to dress.

Mr. Stewart had made a large fortune by inventing a new and cheap process for extracting meat-juices. His rivals said he could "extract it out of anything." The inventor attributed the discovery to his own rare skill as an analytical chemist. If he had the opportunity—and he generally made one—he would

tell you that he was not the first man of science to apply abstract knowledge to a practical purpose. The answer he expected and usually received from a tactful guest was :—"My dear sir ! you have simply followed in the steps of your illustrious predecessor, Liebig." If you said this he regarded you as a man of "sound culture."

Mr. R. B. Stewart—he rather insisted on the initials, which were in honour of the great poet—was anxious not to be classed with mere tradesmen who had grown rich as vendors of patent pills or soaps. He asked the world to honour him as a man of science. It gave him half he asked. The Colonial University, which he endowed with a professorship, conferred on him its highest honorary degree for "his great services to contemporary dietetics."

But for this trifling weakness Mr. Stewart was a good-natured elderly gentleman, who had married "one of the beautiful Miss Rodericks," to the great annoyance of his own grown-up family.

The sons and daughters by his first wife—the second marriage was childless—strongly disapproved of the manner in which their foolish father treated his young wife.

"He makes a perfect fool of her," they said, "and it will end badly."

All their middle-class prejudices bristled, sniffing for coming scandals.

On her side Mrs. Stewart regarded her husband's family despondingly, and feared that she should

make nothing of them, and after the first year of her marriage ceased to think of them.

The recipients of comfortable pensions from the parental purse, their protests naturally never reached an old gentleman as much under the spell as Merlin in the forest of Broceliande.

The marriage had raised the adventurous Stewart into a new social atmosphere. The two other beautiful Miss Rodericks—daughters of the general—had made still more dazzling marriages. Both of Mr. Stewart's sisters-in-law were youthful peeresses—bright lights of the British aristocracy.

That his wife should do as her sisters did was the ruling principle of Mr. Stewart's conduct towards her, consequently there was not a married woman in London who enjoyed greater latitude nor claimed more license.

The poor man, with a foot planted in two generations as well as in different societies with alien standards, concealed bewilderment so cleverly that he was mistaken for a philosopher who had ceased to expect too much from human nature. He was, however, sanguine, trusted his wife, and expected that it "would all work out in the end."

Sybil Stewart's beauty was of the latest type, as evident and vivid as the sun shining on the sea; a fact to be recognised even by those who dislike brilliancy and desire the melancholy languors admired in the sixties.

All popular generalisations about women left her

untouched. She had come too late into the world to be caught in such clumsy nets.

"Providence intends me to continue to be a young woman far into the twentieth century," she said to her husband, "and it would be a form of the most ungracious impiety to baulk an all-wise purpose. I must be myself!"

"Why not?" he asked rather feebly, much as a grey cloud might wonder at the rainbow.

"Why, when I think of it!" she exclaimed with conviction, "I am Progress."

"I don't think I quite understand," said Mr. Stewart.

"Watch me," she answered, "and you will."

This was soon after their marriage. He has since learned much, although his ideas of progress, confined to the material world, differ from those of his wife, which are active chiefly in the moral domain.

Thoughtful mothers with clever, enterprising daughters considered Mrs. Stewart dangerous, and certainly her example was a perilous one for the inexpert to follow; but she enjoyed a popularity denied to women far more useful to the community.

"The decorative side of life," said Mrs. Stewart, "is as important as the moral side," but her severer critics declared that she only cultivated the first.

As a force making for virtue it was generally admitted, even by her admirers, that she might be imperfect; but as an enlightenment to dulness it was agreed that her wit was invaluable.

"I quite," she said, "expect to be misunderstood."

Perhaps she was, yet it was doubtful whether a complete grasp of her complexity would have placed her reputation on a higher scale.



## CHAPTER XII

**MOST** women of fashion have a friend to whom they confide a little of what they think and less of what they do.

Sybil Stewart and Constance Drayton had known one another since they were ten. They had studied the French irregular verbs at school together and, as the former said, "could say things." They were now approaching the daring point at which ladies whose marriages have missed perfection discuss, chiefly by hint and suggestion, the demerits of their husbands.

"Whenever a woman complains to me of the man she has married," said Mrs. Stewart, "I feel that she desires to be my friend. You don't give hostages to the people you don't like."

But in spite of their great intimacy, Mrs. Drayton had never criticised hers before, and her friend, who disliked Mr. Drayton, had been waiting for the moment with a feeling of piqued expectancy.

She laughed at him, however, behind her school-fellow's back.

"If the master of Ravenswood had grown rich on

the Stock Exchange," she said, "he would have looked very much like Mr. Drayton, only better-tempered."

"Well, Connie, what's the matter?" she inquired when Mrs. Drayton appeared in the drawing-room at Pont Street. "You have worried eyes."

"Well I'm not—at least, not exactly," she replied.

"Frankie ill?"

"No, he's very well."

"Frankie's papa's cross then?"

"He is the same as he usually is."

"Then he is charming, of course, although not quite a perfect conductor for the circuit of intelligence."

"There are duller men," replied Mrs. Drayton.

"No doubt. But you really ought to teach Mr. Drayton to look into some one else's garden. He is too pleased with his own backyard. Forgive me my metaphors."

"You are all metaphor," said Mrs. Drayton, feeling, nevertheless, that her friend's figure justly described her husband's narrow views. "But why should he not be satisfied?"

"When he last took me into dinner," Mrs. Stewart answered, "although he led me to understand that he thought most women idiots, yet he did not strike me as perfectly—— What shall I say?—language is too brutal a means of expressing shades of meaning."

"As a man who was quite pleased with his wife?"

suggested Connie Drayton, recalling the wrangle of the morning.

"Oh, he never complained," answered Sybil Stewart with her most candid air.

"You seem to suspect that we don't get on though, Sybil."

"Not in the least ; I was only thinking that it was a little unlucky for him—I mean, for his strong sense of self-esteem—that he didn't marry a fool. Only a woman who is one can properly appreciate those big, handsome dark men. But do forgive my impertinent chatter ! My abnormal taste for watching people I like is dreadfully annoying."

Her friend, she felt, had laid her finger on the weak spot.

"She knows," reflected Mrs. Drayton, "that I don't flatter his vanity enough. I daresay he told her I misunderstood him."

The announcement of lunch interrupted their talk. The delicate subject was resumed over their coffee when Sybil had smoked half her first cigarette.

"There is one advantage generally overlooked," she said, "in marrying a man old enough to be your father twice over."

"What is that ?" asked her friend curiously.

"I wish you would smoke, Connie. Cigarettes *do* lead to candour so wonderfully."

"I don't like it. Besides, I'm too candid already. I want to hear of this advantage you spoke of."

"Don't you see that you are driven to intellectual

pursuits if you marry a worthy man like mine—ripe in years?”

“I don’t follow you, Sybil,” replied Mrs. Drayton with imperfect truth.

“Oh, yes, you do. Look at my sisters. Before we were married they had twice my brains; but, as Lord Belchester says, they’re not in the same street with me now. I explained the reason, and he actually saw it, so it must be obvious. Anne and Charlotte married young men with big positions. In their case the husband and position block out other mental horizons. They’re like Mr. Drayton, but for a better reason. They can’t see into their neighbours’ gardens because their own wall is too high. I married an excellent old gentleman, who isn’t a fixed star in the aristocratic sky, and have no high walls of my own. I cultivate intellect instead of pride. When I made the reason for my superiority clear to Lord Belchester, he exclaimed, ‘By Jove, but you are a wonder!’ I am, no doubt, but not half such a wonder as you with that strange Bluebeard of yours. But I know more of you than you suppose, Connie.”

“You are much too fanciful,” replied Constance Drayton.

“My fancy doesn’t prevent me from hearing things,” was the reply. “Have you ever met my friend, Mr. Locksley?”

“I have heard of him,” she answered, now on the alert. “What did he tell you about me?”

"Nothing worth repeating. I dislike gossip."

"You excite my curiosity, and then say you dislike gossip!"

"Perhaps I will introduce him to you this afternoon," said Mrs. Stewart. "I have an idea that he will be at Ranelagh, and it is time we started."

Mrs. Stewart loved to experiment in other people's affairs of the heart almost as much as in her own. Locksley at that moment was somewhat of a lion. He had just been elected to Parliament for a constituency contested as a forlorn hope. His resolution, energy, and popular eloquence had made an impression in the world of politics. Mrs. Stewart, who insisted on knowing every one who was being talked of, had met him at a dinner-party. Her cleverness and beauty had attracted him, and he had called several times. It chanced, moreover, that Locksley, who had had dealings with Peter Davies, had heard of Philip Gordon's "unfortunate attachment," as Peter called it.

Mrs. Stewart met Mr. Locksley at Lady Belchester's, the evening before she invited Mrs. Drayton to lunch. In a confidential talk with him Philip's name was mentioned, and the outlines of the story, as revealed to Locksley, thus became known to a lady who cultivated, almost as a fine art, the daintiest taste in mischief. It pleased her that evening to take a romantic view of a commonplace misfortune.

"I am so sorry for your friend, Mr. Locksley,"

she almost sighed. "I feel that he will never care for any woman again."

"He has not showed any signs of it at present," Locksley replied. "But a little jilting is not a bad thing for prosperous young men. It even makes some of them work."

"Jilting!" exclaimed Mrs. Stewart, pretending to be pained. "I am sure Mrs. Drayton is incapable of such a thing. We were at the same school for five years and I have known her intimately ever since."

"It is the word his friends employ, however," said Locksley.

"What does Mr. Gordon call it?" she asked.

"He has never mentioned it, and isn't likely to. He would not be pleased if he fancied I had been gossiping about his love-affairs"

"Gossiping, Mr. Locksley!" she answered. "You have only told me."

"Of course that is a very different thing," he replied, a good deal amused, but maintaining a gravity fitted to her attitude of gentle pity.

Here Mrs. Stewart reflected a moment. Connie Drayton, she thought, in keeping this love-story all to herself had treated her badly. She remembered, however, seeing a likeness of Philip Gordon among her friend's more cherished photographs. "A woman," she reflected, "doesn't keep a man's likeness for nothing—especially when she is married to a Bluebeard. Certainly it would be good fun to bring them together!"

"I should so much like to meet your friend," she said, turning to Locksley with her air of original innocence.

"She is charming!" he thought, "and not a bit spoilt."

"Gordon is coming with me to-morrow to see the polo," he said.

"What a coincidence! I shall be there too," she replied. "You might introduce him to me."

"Certainly I will."

"You won't tell him that I asked about his love-affairs?"

"Is it likely? He has no idea that I ever heard of them."

"You are kind!" she exclaimed.

"She *is* charming!" thought he again.

Thus the little plot was made, only Mrs. Stewart omitted to say that she was bringing back to the scene the other actor in a baulked love comedy.

Driving through Hammersmith, which has vainly decorated its draggled skirts with a fringe torn from the petticoat of sham Kensington, the two ladies for once found little to say.

The carriage swung over the bridge across the river. The tide was up, the distances, cleft by the full silver stream, appeared vaguely majestic in a blue summer haze. In the sky slowly curling islets of white clouds were shaping themselves to the fancy of warm air-currents. From the massed trees towards Richmond the rooks could be heard.

Summer languor fell even on Hammersmith, haunt of busses and tramcars, latest growth of the mighty metropolitan fungoid, which, like death, swallows up all sweet things.

"Life in these suburbs seems so shapeless," said Sybil Stewart, as the carriage turned into the grounds of Ranelagh.

"Isn't it generally?" her companion asked.

"Mine isn't. I finish off all my edges symmetrical. I'm not quite sure what the Greeks were like, Connie, but I can't help fancying that I am their moral child."

"You do seem painfully civilised compared with other women."

"Yet some people think me wicked. It is dangerous to character to be original. What a lot of people, and how dismally they are alike!"

The carriage, in its turn, stopped before the clubhouse. They mounted the steps, passed through the hall wavy with the fluffy summer millinery. A combined odour of violet scent and cigarettes and a memory of the retreating spring in the lingering suspicion of lilac met them on the crowded lawns. People were now beginning to move towards the flutter of silk shirts on the polo ground, visible through the moving, well-dressed throngs, when a voice behind Mrs. Stewart caused her to stop.

"Let me introduce Mr. Gordon," it said.

Mrs. Drayton moved on a step, but, glancing back, saw Philip Gordon bowing to Sybil Stewart.

He had not yet seen her, for his face, which before



had been perfectly composed, clouded with trouble when their eyes met.

The moment was embarrassing. If he chose to cherish a grievance it seemed to her that he had some right, yet under the disturbance she felt glad to see him. His face was firmer and more resolute. Certainly he looked distinguished.

Doubts shot through her brain like the grey insects across the shafts of light falling from the boughs above, but before she had time to decide how to act Sybil was introducing her to Mr. Locksley.

"You and Mr. Gordon, Connie, I believe, have met before," she said sweetly.

The young man coloured.

But Mrs. Stewart's purpose controlled the situation so far as tact could hold it. She contrived that they should move forward with the stream of people, Philip Gordon at her side, Mrs. Drayton following with Locksley.

"I seem almost to have known you, Mr. Gordon," said the cunning Sybil. "My old friend Mrs. Drayton has often told me of you. You are quite like her photograph of you."

"I didn't know she had one," blundered Philip, pleased, yet conscious of reddening cheeks.

"Yes, she has, and I've often seen it," said the lady, reading his blush.

The history of the photograph was simple. Willie Elmsley, Philip's schoolfellow, was ranching in Texas, as a last attempt to attain prosperity. His minor

belongings had been scattered among his sisters, and it was from the album of one of her cousins that the likeness in question had been removed by Mrs. Drayton on the day after her engagement to her husband.

"Can't you remember giving it to her?" said Mrs. Stewart innocently.

"No," said he bluntly.

"I have known Connie Drayton since she was a schoolgirl," continued the manœuvrer; "for ever so many years. She is as sweet as ever in spite of a husband who bores exacting people. Forgive me if he's a friend of yours, I have the most heedless tongue in London."

"I don't know him," said Philip.

"How odd! But then men don't always know the husbands of their old friends."

What had Mrs. Drayton told Mrs. Stewart? Philip had no idea, but decided his own unlucky love complication formed no part of their confidence.

Constance Madryn—he still thought of her by her maiden name—wasn't the sort of woman to give a man away because he happened to have made a fool of himself in her sight.

Meanwhile, Locksley was finding Mrs. Drayton "a little difficult to get on with." Surprise at meeting Philip Gordon had driven her some distance from the frontiers of small talk. She would have liked to question Mr. Locksley about the will-case which he had won, but was under the mistaken

impression that men disliked talking to women of their work. If she had consulted Mrs. Stewart, she would have learnt that man's favourite topic was the one affording him the widest scope for display. "They are all peacocks, my dear," she would have said; "even though they may stick the feathers in their minds."

"I was much interested to see that Mr. Gordon was engaged in your last case," she said after a slight pause.

"Philip is a perfectly splendid fellow," said Locksley.

"I'll let you see the sort of fellow you jilted, my lady!" was the sentiment provoking his praise.

"Is he really so clever then at his profession?" she inquired.

"He is as full of promise as any young man at the Bar," said Locksley, looking at her to see the effects of his words; "and if people don't spoil him there will be a career before him."

"I thought," she answered, "that it was only weak-minded people who allowed themselves to be spoilt?"

"I suppose it is," he answered.

But Mrs. Stewart's quick eye had detected four vacant chairs, and after these had been arranged in the most convenient manner—or, rather, in the manner which Mrs. Stewart considered the most convenient, for other purposes than seeing the polo—Philip Gordon found himself sitting next to Constance Drayton behind the two others.

"She is lovelier than ever," he reflected with a pang. She embodied both what he desired and what he had lost in women.

When he had last seen her she had been a charming slim girl, now she was a beautiful graceful woman. He also noticed the subtle moral change. Her manner seemed to say to him: "I have not forgotten a shadow of what has passed between us, but can see no reason why we should not be friends."

She talked of the Square; wondered that she had never seen him there, accounted for it by her prolonged absences from town and the rarity of her visits to her father. After this she brought round the conversation to his own work and prospects.

It was so delightful to hear of old friends succeeding. There was poor Willie Elmsley pretending to ranche in Texas, but always in difficulties. Surely Mr. Gordon remembered Willie, the idlest and most amiable of her cousins.

And gradually she beheld his pride thawing before her own graciousness as the polo ponies swept by, throwing up the moist turf with their shining hoofs.

When the game, which neither of them had very closely watched, was over she had discovered by inference that Philip Gordon had never heard of his father's unfortunate visit to her. It had been made, she remembered, without the son's sanction, and under the circumstances it was not surprising that the foolish old man had kept the blunder to himself.

This discovery came even after so long as a relief. "I would not," she thought, "have his feelings wounded to satisfy the pride of all the Madryns."

The party finally separated well-pleased with itself. Locksley was delighted with the flattering interest that one of the smartest women in London appeared to take in him; Mrs. Stewart was pleased to see, in the mutual satisfaction of Philip Gordon and Connie Drayton, the prospect of a good chance for her mischief. "Something," she thought, "ought to come of it."

Constance Drayton, on her side, remembered the advice which she had given her lover three years before: "Go into the world and work, and some day I shall be proud that you once thought of me." She recalled her words now with that inner thrill of satisfaction which a woman may feel who trusts that her good influence has stimulated a man to action.

The meeting similarly had strengthened the ideal which the long months were beginning to weaken in Philip Gordon. The woman was, at least, no ignoble excuse for his folly. "She was always sweet and good to me," he mused. Turning to arithmetic he remembered that she had been enthroned in his mind for twelve years!

Driving home Mrs. Stewart began to shoot experimental arrows, in the hope of hitting some chance fond memory of her friend's.

"How I should like to find the young man a

wife!" she said. "Whoever his father is—and I'm sure he's distinguished enough to carry off an impossible one—he certainly deserves the very best wife we could find him. It would be an atonement."

"I don't think," replied Connie Drayton hastily, "that he is particularly anxious to have one."

"Oh, but he will be if you encourage the idea! It is the duty of British matrons like ourselves to encourage matrimony as an institution. I will put my two sisters on his track. They shall mate him."

But Sybil Stewart was not surprised that her friend said nothing to encourage the idea.

"Connie," she reflected, "is slyer than I suspected."

## CHAPTER XIII

THE late General Roderick's brilliant daughters, after the triumphs of their respective marriages, desired to enjoy the fruits of their combined social influence.

"Let us get up a sort of woman's club and call it 'The Sisters' Tea Club,'" said Mrs. Stewart, who, although she had not married a peer, was not the least original. "The qualifications," she added, "will, of course, be brains and beauty."

"And birth?" suggested Lady Belchester.

"Most certainly," said Lady Angmering.

"Won't that limit prospects of membership to the vanishing point?" inquired Sybil Stewart, who, having a husband possessed of no claims to the last distinction believed in a democracy of intellect.

Thereupon the sisters made a list of the names of acquaintances who they thought "might do," but were astonished to discover that they were themselves almost the only candidates entirely suitable for election.

"It is ridiculous to be too fussy!" said Sybil Stewart. "Throw 'birth' overboard—it will keep out all the clever professional people, and we must have

a few to give the club a flavour—make brains and beauty nominal, and the thing will be a success.”

The sisters set to work and carried out their idea, with the cleverness which every one expected of them ; and in due course the club came into being. Its members were limited to fifty ; its local habitation was a long room, simply furnished with tea-tables and spindle-legged chairs, at 295, Grafton Street, over Chardonnet's, the famous dressmaker, who “made” for all of the members and where consequently they spent most of their time when in town.

“It's only a sort of dressmaking club, after all,” said the envious, who had no chance of being elected. “The members belong to the very fastest set ; it isn't at all the sort of place for any nice, self-respecting woman to join.”

But, although rumour said evil things of the little tea club, its invitations, almost exclusively given to men, were prized. To receive one gave a young man a certain social prestige. It even suggested that he was well within the inner ring. Moreover, it was not true, as detractors declared, that the members spent their afternoons over absinthe and cigarettes, talking something worse than scandal. The smoking-room was small and unattractive, nor was there any alcoholic stimulant in the place except the sal-volatile on the secretary's toilet-table. Tea and talk—with a generous selection of sandwiches and hot cakes—were the staple refreshment and amusement.



Mrs. Parkington made desperate but unsuccessful efforts to join the club, and entreated Mrs. Drayton, one of the original members, to put her up. It was not until she learnt that by Rule IX. the resignation of every member, on attaining her fiftieth birthday, was required, that she abandoned the project and discovered that "The Sisters'" was a centre of intrigue and scandal which nothing would induce her to permit her daughters to enter.

The success of such places she regarded as the strongest evidence of decay of morals among contemporary would-be women of fashion. "Why, my dear," she would whisper confidentially in a gossip's ear, "girls of twenty receive visits from the fastest men in London. They drink and smoke together. The club ought to be raided by the police. If poor General Roderick, who was an old friend of my late husband, were alive he would never allow his daughters to be mixed up in such a thing. But they tell me they are the ringleaders."

But, in spite of Mrs. Parkington and others holding similar indignant views, the club shone brightly as a clear star in the sky of smartness; and when it appeared in the newspapers that a very amiable Royal Princess had taken tea there as Lady Belchester's guest, although the censorious said it was "a very great pity" even the envious were compelled to admit that "the place couldn't be so bad as people said."

Mrs. Stewart, who never blinked at the truth, nor

their name is, to your father. He has none of your tolerance for people of that kind."

Here the subject dropped, but neither lady was pleased with the other's treatment of it.

Driving home an hour later Mrs. Drayton passed Philip Gordon at the end of the Square within a few yards of his father's house. She bowed and smiled in the friendliest manner. "He shall see," she reflected, "that I have none of my aunt's prejudice."

Philip received with a comforting glow the message sent him.

"How generous she is!" thought he, with that surprising exaggeration of sentiment common even in clever men touched by the finer spirit of a lingering youthful passion.

The bow and smile lit up the Square. The trees rustled musically as in a mountain forest.

It was half-past four; he had walked from his chambers across the Park, and suddenly the object of his thoughts had flashed on him like a meteor in an autumn night.

But it chanced that his father from his bedroom window had witnessed this meeting and wondered at it.

That the Madryns should turn up haughty noses at his son—a rising barrister, a good sportsman, and as fine a gentleman as any in Piccadilly—was the slight which the old man resented most.

Phil, who was good enough for any one, wasn't good enough for those d——d stuck-up Madryns

who couldn't afford to live in their own house and were even contemplating selling their name to a rotten company which he, Mortimer, wouldn't touch with a pair of tongs!

But somehow the bow and smile which his enemy's daughter had so graciously bestowed on his son seemed to palliate "the Madryns' infernal impertinence." Old Gordon, moreover, was impressed by what he regarded as the right sort of splendour.

Mrs. Drayton's chestnuts were perfectly matched and smartly driven. The equipage presented a striking contrast to the badly appointed vehicle jobbed from a Notting Hill Livery Stable by her father.

He wanted to talk to his son about the Madryns. Here was a chance.

"Wasn't that lady I saw bowing to you Mrs. Drayton, Phil?" he asked when they met.

"Yes," replied his son.

"Old Madryn's married daughter?"

The colonel was younger than himself, but it eased his pique to disrespectfully place his enemy among the foolish elders.

"Yes," replied Philip.

"She's dashed well turned-out then. She'll be able to take the old chap for an airing when he has to put down his own 'Shandrydan.'"

"Why should he put it down?" asked the son, ignoring his father's vindictive spirit.

"Because, unless I'm much mistaken, they'll make

him a director o' the 'Virgin Land Company,' whose chief assets are a lot of worthless mortgages."

Young Gordon was interested.

"How do you know?" he inquired, unaware that his father kept a constant watch on the colonel's affairs.

"Black, who is the company's chairman," he answered, "and who runs the show is a sort o' friend o' mine. Well, I put him on old Madryn, I did!"

Here he grinned unpleasantly.

"Colonel Madryn can't know much about business," observed Philip, to test him.

"Know much!" exclaimed his father contemptuously. "Why, he doesn't know nothing. If he did the old mug wouldn't think o' selling himself. But I happened to meet Black in the city a week or two ago, and we talked over the chances of his company. 'It'll pay fifteen per cent.,' says he, 'this time next year.' 'Will it?' said I. 'It will,' said he. 'We only want one or two good names, General Cuthbert-Harding's going to resign. We want a gentleman to take his place.' And here I saw a chance o' doing the Madryns a good turn. 'Look here, Black,' says I, 'why not ask Colonel Madryn, o' Pentash, to take Cuthbert-Harding's place? The way he manages his own estates is a treat! He's as straight as a gun, 'ighly respected, and wants £2,000 a year as bad as any big landed proprietor in England. Think it over.' 'I will,' says he. That's how the 'Virgin Land Company' were put on Madryn!"

And Mortimer's eyes rolled vindictively at the prospect of his enemy's humiliation.

Philip Gordon was too wise to expostulate with his father whose character he knew to be as unchangeable as rock. To do a good turn to his friends (if it were cheap) and an ill turn to his enemies, even though it cost him dear, was a natural instinct in the rugged old man who was absolutely persuaded that he was numbered among the just. The morals learnt on the turf seemed to him quite good enough for any man renting a pew in "St. Peter's, Rutland Square."

Although the son attributed his father's hostility to the colonel mainly to the manner in which the Madryns had treated himself, it nevertheless caused him acute moral discomfort. It was brutal and obviously unreasonable, and he determined that if he could prevent it the colonel should not be "let in."

He would ask Locksley, who knew everything, what he thought of the "Virgin Land Exploitation Company"; and on the following morning about eleven o'clock he called at the wise man's chambers.

"Don't let a friend of yours look at it," said he, "as an investment ; keep it for your enemy."

Then Locksley explained how the system of dexterous financial bluff which kept the concern from crumpling up was one not permanently maintainable. The arrival of Locksley's confidential clerk interrupted this conversation ; Philip Gordon was about to hurry off, when his friend cried :

"Stop a bit ! I've a message for you. Mrs. Stewart has invited me to tea at 'The Sisters' ' this afternoon, and wants me to bring you, too. Will you come ?"

"Yes," said Gordon.

"Then call for me here at four."

"All right."

Then he left his busy friend to his morning labours.

A sense which was hardly prophetic told him that he might meet Mrs. Drayton at the club ; and going to his chambers he neglected his work for a new anthology of the British poets, which, although sent to him by Mrs. Parkington as a Christmas gift, he had never opened before. The selections from Keats and Shelley mentally refreshed him, Matthew Arnold soothed his discontent.

"I must have an odd sort of ridiculous mind," he reflected, as an excuse for his plunge into poetry.

Then, having made a second toilet with extreme care, he lunched at his club and wasted time till the hour of his appointment with Locksley, whom he found still sitting with rumpled hair over his work.

"What, my Narcissus ! is it time to go a-wooing ?" he said, looking up from Briefs and Bluebooks.

"'The New Sirens' will be inconsolable if you keep them waiting," replied Gordon.

"Politics and fashion, learning and law, are all centred in you," a flattering lion-huntress had once said to Locksley. "Only love is wanting !"

To this elegant trilateral efficiency he, in secret,

was trying to live up. His weakness was a too diffuse admiration for women. The world expected a brilliant marriage of him, but unluckily the ladies whom he most admired had always living husbands, and the great match was still to make.

A reputation for professional brilliancy can carry off not a little vanity ; moreover, Locksley's airs as a lady-killer, so oddly assorting with his fame as rising political light, provoked more amusement than anger. He permitted himself to be adored so artlessly that he checked annoyance in beholders by an unconscious appeal to their sense of humour.

Locksley rose from his chair, stretched himself, looked at Gordon, and approved of his elegance.

"You are," he said, smiling, "as 'correct' as the hero of a French novel yet with British morals. I, too, will retire into my inner chamber, and return immaculate in calling clothes and boots that shall outshine the meteor."

"I give you a quarter of an hour," said Gordon, sitting in the rotatory chair his friend had vacated.

"He has done his work and means to play the fool till midnight," he thought.

Then he swung the chair round and looked through the open window at the river shining in the sunshine. Across his mind were scattered the tags of the poetry which he had just read. The feeling was one which he fancied he had outgrown. His mind, moving backwards, was yet anticipating change ; his mood one which youth at all times has obeyed.

These musings the return of Locksley interrupted. They walked to the Strand, from whence a swift hansom hurried them to Grafton Street. Then, mounting carpeted stairs, they passed closed sanctuaries behind which ladies experimented with wonderful garments.

"The whole region," explained Locksley, who had visited it before, "is sacred to the muse of millinery. You are a strayed reveller."

On the topmost stair, in front of a murmur of voices through open doors, stood a boy in buttons, who, conducting them through a number of eagerly talking ladies, announced them to Mrs. Stewart who said :

"I am delighted to see you both."

Then she introduced Philip to her sister, Lady Belchester, who was quite as pretty as Mrs. Stewart, although of less pronounced intellectual mobility.

"Look here, Anne," Mrs. Stewart had said, "I want you to take up Philip Gordon. He is a nice young man and will have no end of money."

"Who is his father?" inquired Lady Belchester.

"Goodness knows! probably the average common old man who has made a fortune!"

"Then why should I take up his son, Sybil?"

"Because he is a rejected lover and the still ardent admirer of Connie Drayton, and I want to bring them together."

To this Lady Belchester replied :

"Let me see Mr. Gordon first."



"You might take my word for him, Anne," said Mrs. Stewart ; "but he shall speak for himself."

That evening Mrs. Stewart remarked to her other sister that Anne was giving herself airs.

"She always did," replied Lady Angmering. "Just because her boy weighs six pounds more than mine—she insists that Reggie is delicate."

"A thing has only to belong to Anne to become perfection. She'll even end in believing Belchester's clever," observed Mrs. Stewart, with her air of candid impartiality.

But Philip Gordon, ignorant of the secret wiles which had brought him an introduction to Lady Belchester, saw neither mischief nor patronage behind it. A man sometimes undergoes an inspection best when he is unaware that it is taking place.

Lady Belchester, who had published a novel entitled "The Newer Sirens" with herself for heroine and her sisters as subsidiary characters, was naturally a patroness of literature, and she was surprised to discover in Philip Gordon an acquaintance with the leading minor poets of the day scarcely inferior to her own.

"I am the only one in my family who takes the faintest interest in literature," she said. "Mrs. Stewart never reads anything."

"I occupy the same position in mine," said he, smiling. "Literature now merely means a box of books from Mudie's. As you say in your charming novel, Lady Belchester, it has become a branch

of journalism for the amusement of the middle classes."

Lady Belchester felt a secret glow of gratification. She was accustomed to receive compliments concerning her novel, but they usually came from young gentlemen ignorant of its teachings. But here was one who had read and understood.

"Sybil was right," she thought. "He is quite nice. She didn't even discover he was clever. I always see further than she does. Some day, perhaps, I'll find a nice wife for him."

Then, while her thoughts were ranging over her acquaintances in search of possible candidates for this honour, Mrs. Drayton entered the room.

The club was now full. Every tea-table was taken. In the air was the faint reek of hot cakes.

"There is Mrs. Drayton," said Philip.

"I understand she is an old friend of yours," said Lady Belchester.

"I have known her ever since she was a little girl."

"I think she is very handsome," said Lady Belchester.

"I think her lovely," said Philip. "I want to tell her something."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Lady Belchester, with a suspicion of archness.

"Only about an investment in which her father is interested," he explained.

"Then tell her at once, and ask my sister to speak to me."

He went to the further end of the room where Mrs. Stewart and Mrs. Drayton were standing deep in conversation and delivered Lady Belchester's message; then, turning to Mrs. Drayton, said that he had something particular to say.

She looked at him in some surprise.

"What about?" she asked.

"Finance," he replied.

"Is that all?" said Mrs. Stewart, who had been listening. "We hoped for something thrilling."

She crossed the room to her sister and left them alone.

Then he told her of the "Virgin Land Exploitation Company," and hoped that Colonel Madryn had not accepted the directorship.

"I believe in my father's judgment," he added, "and I believe in Locksley's. Colonel Madryn ought not to touch the 'Virgin Land.' It is tainted. Locksley says it's an investment for your enemy. I should have written to you about this, but somehow thought that I might see you here to-day."

She was pleased and touched even to the point of embarrassment.

"My father will accept the directorship if he isn't stopped in time," she replied. "I will see him this evening and tell him. I am very grateful, Mr. Gordon."

Then their eyes met, and each saw the kindness in the gaze of the other.

It seemed to her that chance which had first brought them together before was purposely bringing them together now.

"He would be," she thought, "a friend worth having."

## CHAPTER XIV

EVEN unlucky men, and Colonel Madryn merged himself in the ranks of the despitely used, may be saved from blunder at the last moment.

The directorship smiled agreeably on the colonel. "I know a good deal about land," he told himself. "Black, of course, will manage the Stock Exchange part of the business, and I can trust him."

He was sitting in his study, preparing to write to Black, when his daughter entered the room and earnestly urged him to have nothing whatever to do with the "Virgin Land Company." She had never interfered in his affairs before, and her unexpected intervention now surprised him. Still he considered that a married daughter acquires certain rights as a counsellor, and suffered her advice with comparative gladness. The offer of the directorship was the first bid for his experience, and it was not pleasant to discover a less flattering reason for the offer. Even before his daughter had appeared on the scene he had tried not to see the little cloud of misgiving, but could not forget the unhappy example set to his class by his late wife's brother, Lord Dartfield,

when, after its melancholy collapse, the Blue-faced Mining Syndicate was wound up.

"Think of poor Uncle Dartfield's case," said his daughter.

But the colonel, who had always thought his brother-in-law a fool, resented the implied comparison.

"Dartfield's absurd vanity tempted him," he said. "He knew nothing of business. No one ever managed his own estates worse."

"Willie always said his father took it up against his better judgment," said Constance Drayton. "He wanted the money so badly."

"Men who act in opposition to their judgment deserve all they get," said the colonel. "I should expect nothing better myself. Besides, you mentioned the name of that man Gordon as an authority. It would afford him great satisfaction to do me an ill turn."

"But the warning comes from his son. Both Mr. Locksley and he are persuaded your name is only wanted as a decoy."

Then the colonel remembered that a year or two ago young Gordon had been supposed to be in love with his daughter. Whilst he was wondering how this might affect the case she resumed the attack.

"Mr. Gordon thinks it would be the height of folly to mix yourself up in this business. Surely his opinion must carry weight! You would be quite at the mercy of a little ring of stock-jobbers,

he says. The Madryns have suffered enough already from agricultural depression without risking an alliance with adventurers like Mr. Black."

"My dear Constance!" exclaimed the colonel, "I must beg of you not to scold me! Pray remember that I am not quite a fool."

Mrs. Drayton, as eager women will, was driving him too hard.

At this juncture, however, Miss Madryn appeared and the question was referred to her whilst the colonel sat gloomily at his table stroking his white moustache with the feather of a quill, seeing the price of his wisdom vanishing like the gold of the sunset behind banks of melancholy clouds.

Miss Madryn said that she did not know, she was sure; that it was best to act with caution, and suggested another consultation with Mr. Price, the lawyer, who had shares in the company himself.

Here the matter stood when Constance left Rutland Square. Driving passed No. 49, she beheld the Gordons' house brilliantly lighted up. The old man was feasting with his friends. How strange it seemed, she thought, that the interests of these people should touch those of the Madryns!

When she reached home she met her husband, who was going out, at the foot of the stairs.

"Have you been to Rutland Square?" he asked.

"Yes."

"What for?"

"To urge my father not to accept the directorship

of the 'Virgin Land Exploitation Company' which has been offered him."

"You don't grudge him the director's fees?"

"The risk to our name is what I grudge," she replied.

"Call a cab," said Drayton to the footman.

The sound of the whistle followed his wife upstairs.

She felt that she was beginning to dislike her husband, but forgot that many months had passed since she had sought to obtain his favour, and now she had ceased to regret that he should find his interests and amusements away from home.

"So long as your husband doesn't bother, you are quite prepared to treat him as partner outside the business," Sybil Stewart had lately said to her. "My feeling for *mon vieux* is different. He has to tell me everything he does."

"Because you are anxious to know, Sybil?" her friend had inquired maliciously.

"No ; because it is good for him. It is the duty of every serious woman to maintain discipline even after the sky has fallen. At your fireside, dear, I fear this chastening influence is wanting. It is a sentimental error to imagine that the sacred institution known as the British Home is due to marriage, it is the direct outcome of the domestic discipline which teaches us only to yawn in private."

When the street door closed behind Drayton ten o'clock was striking, and his wife was still wondering what could be done to warn her father off the



directorship. Her interference had not been adroit, and she felt that he was capable of incurring even graver dangers to show his confidence in his own wisdom.

What could be done? To whom could she turn for help with the greatest certainty of assistance? Instinct pointed to Philip Gordon. Without further hesitation she sat down and wrote him the following letter :

“DEAR MR. GORDON,—I have just seen my father and left him hesitating, but I fear in favour of the directorship. There is so little time. What can we do? He will see his lawyer in the morning—Mr. Price is a shareholder in the concern—and will decide finally in the afternoon. I cannot help feeling that my interference annoyed him! He thinks no woman can understand a question of business, and I was quite unable to state the case against the company clearly. But if this could be done with authority I feel convinced that he would have nothing to do with it.

“Always yours gratefully,

“CONSTANCE DRAYTON.”

She addressed the letter to Philip Gordon, 49, Rutland Square, and sent it off at once by a footman in the hope that he might get it that night.

Philip Gordon received the letter—the first that she had written to him—as the last guest drove away. As a proof of her faith in his friendship it deeply gratified him.

“A billydoo I’ll be bound, Phil,” called out his

father, half-way up the stairs, who had taken more wine than was good for him and reverted in consequence to freer habits of speech ; "a wise girl won't trust the post, at least she wouldn't in my time, an' girls are the one thing that don't change."

Mortimer disappeared on the landing before his son grasped the situation. Mrs. Drayton, Philip suspected, had tried to "rush" her father. From what he remembered of him too much surface energy, in dealing with the colonel, was a mistake. A shock from without seemed likelier to move him. How could Colonel Madryn be frightened? Was not a sensational financial journalist the most potent influence for raising a panic?

Why not go down to Fleet Street and see Farmer? The thought carried him out to the Square and into a passing hansom.

The lights were still burning at the Madryn's where usually all was dark by eleven.

Philip Gordon passed the stream of night traffic setting west from the theatres,—the most vivid flutter of London's darkling life.

Horace Farmer was assistant-editor of *The Financial Adviser*, a daily organ dealing with financial and industrial enterprises as honestly as a stock manipulating proprietor and the exigencies of the advertising department permitted. Farmer had been at Oxford with Philip Gordon, where he had done nothing in particular beyond spending money which he some day hoped to earn. Spurred by this

state of embarrassment he had drifted in the hope of salvation to the Stock Exchange, where he did not succeed. The next step, of course, was journalism—a profession full of promise, viewed from the outside, but of melancholy limitations after the threshold has been crossed.

Horace Farmer had borrowed £20 of Gordon, and since the latter was unlikely to receive payment in cash, it had occurred to him that he might as well claim it in the shape of advice.

The offices of *The Financial Adviser* were in a grimy street, dark with the shadow of printing-ink and haunted by the ghosts of three generations of compositors. A fat man sat nightly at the low doorway “timing” the messengers and guarding the sacred precincts against intruders.

To him Philip Gordon gave his card and said :

“Please send this up to Mr. Farmer, and say that I must see him on important business.”

Gordon waited. The printing-presses in the upper rooms shook the frail tenement relentlessly. “We’ll let you know what dangerous devils are shut up here !” they growled. The satanic mockery rattled down the dark stair. An ancient “bill” bearing the legend, “Slump all along the Line,” stirred to the throbbings as though with the wind of the ancient panic.

Farmer, a young man with harassed eyes and unkempt appearance, appeared above, and cried :

“Come up, my dear fellow. Delighted to see you !”

Philip obeyed.

"It's all right about those two tenners," he added airily, as they shook hands; "I've not forgotten."

"I shouldn't care if you had," said Gordon; "we won't talk about that till you have made your fortune."

"I couldn't think of such a thing," replied the other vaguely, opening the door into a repellent looking apartment smelling of moist ink and lighted with flaring gas-jets. "But come into my den."

They sat down at a table strewn with proofs scored with blue pencil marks.

"You're very busy," said Gordon.

"Frightfully," replied Farmer, with a gesture of one brushing off a swarm of buzzing, flying things. "We go to press in an hour."

"I want your advice, and won't keep you a minute," said Gordon.

"What is it?"

Gordon was ready with his story. A friend was on the point of investing largely in "Virgin Lands," but he, Gordon, was persuaded the speculation was of the maddest; could Farmer let him know the candid opinion of *The Financial Adviser* on the company.

Farmer stroked a chin already in need of tomorrow's razor, and thought for a moment. He remembered that Gordon was a good fellow who had given him dinners and lent him money. Perhaps the anonymous speculator was his friend's father.

"Well?" said Gordon, watching the other's face.

"My advice to your friend is—don't!" replied Farmer emphatically.

"But he is such an obstinate ass, and always asking for proofs," said Gordon. "Haven't you something printed, with the great authority of the paper behind it, to give me to show him?"

Farmer hesitated a moment, then rose to his feet.

"You're a good fellow, Gordon," he said, "and I'll let you read something Soames—a most reliable man—has just sent in."

Then he rummaged among the proofs, produced an article headed "Mr. Black's Latest," and handed it to Gordon, who glanced through it hastily and perceived that it was a piece of destructive criticism, leaving the "Virgin Land Exploitation Company" not a single sound financial leg to stand on.

"Will this appear to-morrow?" asked Gordon.

"If it isn't crowded out," said the other; "if it is, it will be let alone for the present by the *Adviser*."

Gordon felt that the article would not be printed.

Farmer, a little anxiously, held out his hand for the proof which Gordon retained.

"Look here!" he said; "let me keep this. No one will ever know it was contributed to the paper if it doesn't appear to-morrow. If it does it won't matter."

"If the proprietor heard of it he'd sack me at a moment's notice," said the perturbed editor.

"But he will never know. I'll show it to my friend

as the opinion of a financial expert,—he's the sort of ass who is only influenced by printed matter,—and when he has read it I'll see that the proof is destroyed. Besides, if ever the thing did leak out, I will give you my word of honour you shan't suffer, and my father will back my promise. Come, Farmer, I would run much bigger risks than this for you!"

Farmer hesitated a second or two. A few years later he would have put a price on the proof, but he was not yet fully developed on the greedy side.

"All right, Gordon," he said, "keep the confounded thing. It won't appear. Old Henessey, the manager, has had the tip from the boss and we're to 'chuck' it. The old man says it will do more harm than good. He's always on the side of the public good. But I shall look to you to keep the thing dark."

"You can trust me," replied Gordon. "And now, Farmer, come and dine with me at the club on Saturday, at eight. We'll have a pleasant evening together, that is to say, if you'll promise never to speak of that confounded loan again."

Farmer, who in theory liked to fancy that he paid all his debts, coloured slightly and replied, "Delighted, old chap, I'm sure."

A heated compositor, in dirty apron, rushed in, flourishing damp proofsheets, announcing that they were "at a standstill for copy"; and Gordon, with a sense of security and the article in his pocket, hurried down to the narrow street where his cab was waiting and told the man to drive to his club, where

he sat down and wrote to Mrs. Drayton a letter safeguarding the editor and urging her to send the proof at once to Colonel Madryn. "If," he said, "you will allow me, I will call on you at four o'clock to-morrow, and give you all necessary information as to the weight and authenticity of the enclosed attack on the 'Virgin Land Company.'"

Having finished this hasty note he posted it in Piccadilly just as the box was being cleared. Then, walking back to Rutland Square, now deep in its midnight slumbers, he went to bed and lay awake, in a strange state of elation, till the dawn lights woke the sparrows and he fell asleep to their chirpings.

## CHAPTER XV

CONSTANCE DRAYTON received Gordon's letter and the suppressed article with her morning tea. His promptness of action struck her as the brightest proof of devotion. He had done exactly as she wished. No one before had ever been so eagerly helpful.

"It is good of him!" she thought. But she would not admit the other feeling which stirred beneath this clear sense of gratitude.

By half-past nine she was already on her way to her father's to try her new weapon of persuasion—long before the appearance of her husband, to whose disadvantage she was unconsciously comparing the young man she might have married in his stead. But the parallel, by an effort of will, was thrust to the inner recesses of thought. Frank Drayton was selfish, Philip Gordon was not; the husband's handsome face was sullen, the friend's blue eyes filled with kindness. Would she have been happier with the younger man? But the mental processes were too indistinct to reach the consistency of a train of thought.

Nevertheless, the feeling behind gratitude stopped



her hansom at a post-office and sent the following telegram to Philip Gordon :

"My best thanks. Call at 'The Sisters' at four.—  
CONSTANCE DRAYTON."

Had her thoughts and half-thoughts been revealed—to Sybil Stewart, for example—her friend would have said that the comparison, unflattering to the husband, and the reception of the amiable benefactor at the club, were all manifestations of that discretion which has caused male philosophers of obsolete systems of thought to place woman in a lower rank than man as an honourable being.

Already Mrs. Drayton had made up her mind what she should say to Philip Gordon, "Thank you very much for the great service which you have rendered us!" The exact note of warmth to be thrown into her voice and manner, as well as the dress and hat to be worn, had been instinctively prearranged. Yet Mrs. Stewart declared that Connie Drayton was the simplest woman she knew.

Colonel Madryn was standing at the window when his daughter drove up in a hansom—a vehicle which he disliked women to use, just as he disliked other customs now common even with the unemancipated. He supposed she couldn't wait for the carriage, in her haste to come to worry him about the directorship! He noted her cheerful smile, however, and supposed she brought what she regarded as good news.

Miss Madryn was seated at the breakfast-table when her niece entered.

"Good heavens, Connie!" she exclaimed, "what brings you so early?"

"Business," was the reply. "Read that, papa."

She handed the colonel the proof.

"Mr. Black's Latest," murmured her father, with an air of vexation. "I hoped we had finished with that."

But he took out his glasses, and, standing with his back to the light, read with a rueful face the vigorous and lucid criticism of a company which had smothered itself by stealth in a maze of dubious mining speculations. The risks were apparent to the dullest brain.

"If this account of the 'Virgin Land Company' is true," he said, "I cannot possibly touch it." The admission gave his pride a painful twist. "But," he continued, "what authority has the writer?"

"Mr. Philip Gordon posted it to me last night. It was written for a leading newspaper, but will not be printed—at least for the present."

"What's the name of the paper?" asked the colonel irritably. "The whole thing sounds confoundedly mysterious."

"You can read Mr. Gordon's letter," replied his daughter. "That makes it clear enough."

She handed the letter which filled two sides of a sheet of paper, the second leaf, with the request to be allowed to call, she had torn off.

Gordon's comments increased the weight of the warning.

"This thing," said the colonel, "must be returned to Mr. Gordon, to whom, I must say, I think we have reason to be grateful."

He handed her the proof which she replaced in the envelope.

"And now," he went on, "I have no option but to refuse the seat on the Board." He saw £2,000 a year vanishing under the smoke of his disappointment. Though he spoke of gratitude he felt little. There is a form of pride that prefers shipwreck to rescue in a patronising lifeboat.

"I always felt that it would have been a mistake to accept the directorship," observed Miss Madryn. "Mr. Black struck me as a person with a most unpleasant manner—a sort of *faux-bonhomme*, you know, Connie! May I see those mysterious documents?"

"Mr. Gordon distinctly says that they are intended solely for my eye," replied the colonel irritably. "Moreover, they are of too technical a character for a lady to understand."

"I have no doubt I could understand the thing," replied his sister, "since it has persuaded you. However, I've no wish to see it."

But the colonel, who made a point of never wrangling, checked a retort and simply said that he should have nothing to do with the company, and that it was useless to discuss the subject further.

Thus ended an incident in which it seemed to Constance Drayton that Philip Gordon had shown intelligence and unselfish discretion. When, a few minutes later, she returned to Sloane Street she found her husband beguiling breakfast with the pink sporting paper which, of all publications, she most detested.

"What energy!" he said with lazy indifference, glancing up from its pages. "An early morning service or a sunrise?"

"I have been to Rutland Square to see my father, who has decided not to accept that directorship," she said coldly.

"Oh, that 'Land Exploitation' thing?" he replied. "Bang goes two thousand a year, then. I hope he can afford it."

She closed the door and left him thinking that nothing deteriorated a man more than the idleness begotten of a loutish intelligence. Disparaging criticisms trooped across her mind involuntarily for the rest of a morning, spent driving with her little boy in the Park. The pretty child's bright hair shining, like her own, in the sunshine reassured her by a likeness in which the father had no visible share. She knew that her resentment was unwifely, that a "good woman" would have suppressed the feeling that lay, like a black shadow, across her heart; was it, she wondered, only the disillusion common to marriage as a human institution?

Daily she was taking small doses of aversion. He

never had an idea which linked with one of hers. His polygamous instincts, now more than suspected yet never denounced, were steadily widening and increasing the gap between them.

Four o'clock found her at "The Sisters'," waiting for Philip Gordon. There were few members in the room, and those were engaged with their correspondence. The scratching of their pens broke the silence.

She chose a table in a recess, and waited. How pleasant it seemed to expect him!

Her musing was interrupted by a radiant lady of fashion whose character gossip did not spare, who, rustling into the club, exclaimed:

"My dear! that is the most delicious hat I have ever seen you wear!" Then, having talked millinery, she invited Mrs. Drayton to see her try on a new gown downstairs. Another clubwoman, with more leisure, witnessed the ceremony.

At last the page appeared, solemnly announcing "Mr. Gordon"; and it seemed to her that a little breath of simplicity and freshness entered the fastidious room.

"Thank you very much," she said, "for the great service you have rendered us."

The three ladies writing letters looked round anxiously, but her murmured greeting did not reach them.

"It was nothing," he answered, smiling. "Of course I was delighted to be of use."

"Here is the article," she said, handing him an envelope. "It has had the desired effect on my father. No one shall be compromised."

"That's capital!" said he. "I'm so glad!"

"You will have tea, of course? No one comes to 'The Sisters' without tea."

She rang the bell for the usual supply of hot cakes, sandwiches, and delicate crockery.

"Always insist on men callers taking tea; it looks so innocent," was one of the unwritten precepts of the club, originating with Mrs. Stewart and welcomed by the members.

It seemed so odd for them to be together in a woman's club drinking tea. The artificiality of the surroundings contrasted strangely with the overshadowing memory of their first meeting. Circumstance seemed to make her part of a nameless game. To-morrow the club would be saying, "Who was the man who had tea yesterday with Connie Drayton?" They only talked of commonplace things, of the polo at Ranelagh, or the extreme beauty of the weather; but her sense of something beyond gratitude was revealed in the sweetness of her manner and the abandonment of her pride.

Whilst they were talking Mrs. Stewart entered the club, and, feigning not to see them, took a seat at the remote end of the room.

"It is rather a ridiculous thing to say, Mrs. Drayton," said Philip Gordon, "but this doesn't seem quite real."

"Did you say that," she asked, "because Mrs. Stewart pretended not to see us?"

"Perhaps I did," he replied; "but why should she?"

"Because she treats everything in life like a scene in a play. It makes her mischievous—even dangerous at times—but never prevents her from being charming. I shall go over to speak with her."

She crossed the room to the armchair where Mrs. Stewart was sitting, and said:

"Sybil, why did you pretend not to see us?"

"Did I?" she answered. "Surely not. Even if I did it must have been quite a good instinct that prompted me. You see I can't help thinking that the club ought to have something of the—shall I call it, reserve?—of a boudoir."

"You are suggesting that Mr. Gordon oughtn't to call on me here."

"Not in the least. It is much less conventional than a call at home. Besides, you are old friends and even if you were not, he is awfully nice."

"I wanted to thank him for helping my father out of a very critical business."

"My dear! how admirably you explain! And how considerate not to leave the gratitude to Colonel Madryn!"

"And now you know why he is here," continued Constance, ignoring her friend's smiling irony, "you must come and have tea with us. I have had already

to apologise for your very visible attempt not to see us."

Mrs. Stewart crossed the room to the tea-table, shook hands with Gordon, and said :

"Mrs. Drayton has been scolding me, but I never do see people—especially at this table. I'm the least observant woman in London."

After this hint, that she was observing them with a friendly eye, they chatted and laughed together for half an hour—till Gordon went.

But, after Gordon had left the club, Sybil Stewart altered her manner pretending to be grave,—for she could slip from the semblance of one mood to that of another as naturally as the wind changes the face of the sky,—and said warningly :

"Connie, take care !"

"Why ?"

"That is a most lovable young man—frank, nice, pleasant to look at, everything in fact."

"Well, suppose he is !"

"If you are not careful he will end in falling in love with you."

Constance Drayton coloured, and answered :

"What a perfectly ridiculous idea."

"But even if he did," continued Sybil Stewart, "he would keep it to himself, so it wouldn't matter since you would be the last woman in London to hear of it."

"You talk as though friendship between a man and woman were impossible," said Constance.



"What! I? Am I not always trying to promote it? My difficulty is the instability of the man."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Mrs. Drayton.

"Perhaps. Only a very practical sort of nonsense."

But the member who had spent the afternoon trying on a new gown, re-entering the club to announce a triumphant fit, brought them down from the clouds of an impractical conversation.

"The little fishes are beginning to nibble at the bait," thought Mrs. Stewart, as she drove home.

Sybil Stewart, from whom none of Mr. Stewart's secrets were hid, knew more of the undomestic habits of several of her friends' husbands than had been revealed to their wives. "You must find out all about 'Bluebeard,'" she had once said, "I believe he is a bad man." Stewart—a garrulous, inquisitive, uxorious elder—brought back the commonplace story of that "other establishment," which is too often the squalid rock on which seemingly irreproachable marriages founder. Sybil Stewart's profound admiration for her schoolfellow had increased her dislike for her schoolfellow's husband. Several years earlier, moreover, before Mr. Stewart, with his wealth-compelling "Lactavis," had loomed above her matrimonial horizon she had given Drayton hints—which if he saw he certainly overlooked—that he was an eligible bachelor and she a brilliant maid in search of a happy home. How her brightness would have been set off by his dulness and most desirable income! This slight she might possibly have

forgotten if she had not learnt, through the usual channels of malicious gossip, that Frank Drayton had once said "Sybil Roderick talked too much" (he had employed a coarser verb), and that he should "be sorry for the man fool enough to marry her." For this unpardonable offence he had been placed for ever on her black list. But, although she was never known to say a complimentary thing of Drayton, her affection for his wife had hitherto tied her hands. But the information, with which Mr. Stewart had armed her, brought an important new influence into the problem.

At first the idea of punishing the sinner by opening the eyes of his wife presented itself to her mind. Would not Connie be happier with a separation, an ample allowance, and the charge of the boy than living in a haze of suspicion under such a roof? This commonplace ending did not appeal, however, to her imagination, especially after Philip Gordon appeared, bringing fresh dramatic possibilities. Here was the faithful lover to save the situation and reward the ill-used wife! For Mrs. Stewart could not help measuring the world in which she lived by a scale taking its standard from the machinery of the French dramatist. How could the threads of this tangle be unravelled? She seemed to see the solution of it in her brain on a stage, as it were, but without actually defining the issues in words. According to her plan Gordon's fidelity must be rewarded. The difficulty was to spare her friend the

dismal social consequences accompanying adventures of this nature. But Mrs. Stewart never realised that she was playing with uncontrollable forces. It was within her power to provoke the explosion, but to reconstruct the shattered fabric as she wished, was beyond the range of her cunning.

## CHAPTER XVI

SELF-INDULGENCE can be practised in comparative immunity only in states of considerable prosperity ; and even there it invites conspicuous overthrow. Among men inadequately unprotected by wealth, it leads, when given full sway, to the workhouse and the jail. The destroyer of the nobler human aspirations, it sinks to sensual levels ruled over by Priapus and the pot-bellied demons of the wine-pot. Hitherward Frank Drayton was rapidly journeying.

He regarded himself simply as "just like other fellows, you know"; and his conduct gave him so little uneasiness that in some obscure manner he half approved of himself as an economist who makes the best use of generous opportunity. He had not been married a year before he discovered his wife's disappointment. At first, when she permitted him to see, as she did often enough, that she could not admire him for qualities which he did not possess yet which his vanity claimed, he sulked and snarled at her ; but gradually each learnt a lesson, although it was not the right one. Drayton said to himself, "This is the sort of thing that always happens in marriage," and "made the

best of it " in what he regarded as the usual manner. The prestige of his wife's beauty and name he valued nearly at their worth as decorative social advantages suited to his position.

"I take the commonsense view," he told his friends, reviewing the unsuccessful careers of other couples. "Only a rank duffer expects too much from marriage."

When he had said this he felt that he had expressed in a phrase the whole secret of marriage; yet in secret it galled him that his wife did not admire him as a dashing and gallant sportsman.

By a somewhat different process of enlightenment his wife had arrived at a similar mental attitude towards their marriage now regarded, through a haze of disillusion, as a state to be endured with the least possible sacrifice of personal dignity. Had she been prepared to fling her dignity on the altar of wifely duty as a propitiatory burnt-offering, perhaps the smoke of it might have prevented Drayton from returning to his former habits as a loose-living bachelor.

A few days after Colonel Madryn's refusal to join the Board of Directors of the "Virgin Land Company," that significant fact was published in an evening paper hostile to the venture. In another column there appeared an article bearing a strong family likeness to that which the colonel had already read.

The colonel was annoyed, for the negotiations were supposed to have been conducted in secret.

"These confounded newspaper men get hold of everything," he said ; and forthwith wrote a letter to Mr. Black, the motive force of the company, pointing out that "the unfortunate statement" had been made without his, the colonel's, sanction or knowledge. This letter received no answer. Probably Mr. Black was too busy to attend to the minor amenities. The article, however, was the beginning of the collapse of a company which shrank in proportion as the bubbles which Black had blown to raise it into the region of reasonable investments popped one after the other. When the panic-stricken shareholders rushed in clamorous agitation to a general meeting, the colonel, with a sense of relief, saw from what indignities he had been saved. Moreover, the fact (now generally known) that he had refused a bait which had captured others, won him a reputation for wisdom, which, although undeserved, still flattered his vanity and helped to spur his gratitude.

When he passed old Gordon in the Square he no longer utterly despised him.

It was fortunate that Colonel Madryn did not know what Mortimer Gordon said when he heard of his escape, but, as he did not, he regarded him as the indirect means of his salvation ; and if the ex-bookmaker who had "done" him thirty-five years before, had stopped him in the Square and insisted, on shaking his hand—well, he might even have been allowed to shake it.

One morning at lunch, Miss Madryn happened to remark that she was afraid Connie and Frank were not "getting on so well as they might." She had dined with them the evening before and they had scarcely exchanged a word. After dinner he had gone out. "When I asked her where," Miss Madryn complained, "Connie said she had no idea. But I gathered from Louise, Connie's maid, you know, that he almost always leaves the house after dinner, and frequently does not return till the following day."

The colonel, suspecting that his sister had been "pumping" the maid, objected on principle.

"It doesn't do," said he, "to encourage a maid's gossip: It undermines all notions of household discipline."

"Is it likely I should?" replied his sister indignantly; "Louise offered the information and it bears out what I have long feared."

"Of course Drayton's manners are bad," said the colonel, who would have liked his son-in-law better if he could; "but his wife ought to see to those. So long as she does not complain it is better to see nothing."

"Is she likely to complain?" asked Miss Madryn.

"I am sure I cannot say," said the colonel. "She is a young woman with a strong sense of her own dignity."

"She is a Madryn," interposed his sister.

This conversation was renewed until finally the colonel decided to call on his son-in-law at the

sporting club where Drayton generally wasted his time in the afternoon.

Drayton was in the billiard-room but came down to receive the colonel in the hall.

"You have never been to see me in my pothouse before," said Drayton, throwing the end of a cigar into an ash-tray.

"I fancied I should find you here," replied his father-in-law gravely.

They went into the waiting-room, which was empty because it was the one room where smoking was not allowed, and the colonel accepted the offer of tea.

"He is getting baggy about the eyes," he thought, "and looks as though he drank too much."

His train of thought was so unflattering that he made an effort to check it, lest it should overshadow his visit of diplomatic inquiry.

"How is Constance?" he asked.

"Very well," replied Drayton.

"And little Frankie?"

"Quite fit."

There was a short silence. The colonel collected his thoughts, the son-in-law a little anxiously wondered "what the deuce had brought him."

Sometimes when we think ourselves most diplomatic we make most mischief.

To mask his purpose the colonel took a conversational turn to a subject that seemed invitingly neutral.



"By-the-bye, Frank," he said, "I want you to do something for me, if you will."

"Delighted, I'm sure, colonel!"

"Of course you know that I should have gone on the Board of that unlucky 'Virgin Land Company' if young Gordon had not warned me. I understand that you and Constance occasionally meet him, but the message would come better from you. Would you mind saying that I am greatly obliged to him for the information he gave me? You saw what a pitiful figure the directors cut last week at the general meeting. Well, if Gordon had not opened my eyes I should have been in the same humiliating position!"

But Drayton's eyes were opened too. So far as he had considered the matter—which, as it did not concern himself, was very little indeed—he attributed the colonel's escape to the old soldier's unaided shrewdness. But here was the real explanation! Gordon had given his wife the tip. The thought awoke his dormant jealousy.

"I shall be delighted to thank Gordon in your name, colonel," he replied. "But shall I ask him to call?"

The colonel shook his head.

"I would rather you did not," he answered. "The father lives in the Square. Many years ago I had some unpleasant dealings with him which make it impossible to meet the son."

"Everybody knows old Gordon started life as a

'bookie,' but haven't I seen young Gordon at your house, colonel?"

"Yes; but before I knew who his father was."

Here the colonel paused, doubtful whether he should tell his son-in-law of old Gordon's visit and its object; but decided that it would be a mistake.

"The old man has heaps of money now," said Drayton suggestively.

"That does not alter the case so far as I am concerned," replied the colonel stiffly; "but then I am old-fashioned. There is something else, however, that I wish to say, Drayton. I was sorry to hear from my sister that she fears my daughter and you are not getting on."

"Not getting on!" replied Drayton, in feigned surprise. "There must be some mistake, for I can't believe Connie has been complaining."

"She has not been complaining," replied the colonel severely; "but there may be—how shall I describe them?—little misunderstandings such as onlookers see which, unless explained in time, become—in the bulk, I mean—a serious grievance."

"Of course, if you count them," replied Drayton, "where are you, I should like to know? How will any married couple you like to name come out on the top?"

"He is dreadfully slangy!" thought the colonel. But he was pleased with his own last speech which struck him as exceedingly diplomatic. "You mean

to say," he said, "that there is no serious difference between you?"

"I mean we are a good average couple. We like different people, and we like different things. That's nature, I suppose. We can't alter that, but there's nothing for any one to worry about."

"I am relieved to hear you say so," said the colonel. "My daughter may be somewhat intolerant in her views, and if you think a hint from me might—eh—in any way—you understand me?—make things smoother——"

"Thanks, colonel. I would rather you said nothing to her. We'd rather work out the thing alone."

The colonel reflected a moment—without grappling with the subject he seemed to have exhausted it—but could think of nothing more to say. So he took his leave—not very cordially in spite of an effort at warmth—and walked back to Rutland Square with a conscious feeling that he disliked his son-in-law. The fellow was deteriorating.

But Drayton had been impressed in a manner which his father-in-law was very far from suspecting.

What did young Gordon's influence on his wife mean? Hitherto Drayton had looked on him as merely "one of the fellows he had cut out." Still he remembered that it was the rivalry of this one which "brought him to the scratch."

"I'll find out what it all means, I swear I will," thought Drayton. "You never know what a woman will do when she gets her back up."

His coarse vanity was pricked all over. He remembered that his wife was dining with Mrs. Stewart that night ; and, having dined heavily himself at a club where greediness was cultivated as a serious art, he found his way home a little before eleven, "determined to have it out with her."

His man told him that Mrs. Drayton had not returned.

Albert, Drayton's valet, was a sly fellow with a taste for mischief who read his master almost as easily as he wore his clothes. He also had his own reasons for disliking Louise, Mrs. Drayton's maid. When, therefore, he was asked casually whether Mr. Philip Gordon had called lately, he decided to be innocently communicative. So far as he knew, Mr. Gordon never did call at the house ; but Albert remembered the under-footman taking a letter late at night addressed to Mr. Gordon at Rutland Square. He also, with the dexterity of his class, hinted that Louise was not to be trusted, and that she had had several talks (apparently of a private character) with Miss Madryn.

"If they don't look out there'll be a pretty 'bust up' here one of these fine days," he observed later on to the women downstairs.

"It's all his fault," said the upper-housemaid.

"Of course, it's always us, my dear !" smiled the ironical Albert.

"Deceiving her as he does !" exclaimed she.

"Snubbing him as she does !" said he,

"Doesn't he deserve it?" asked the maid.

"That doesn't make it any better to put up with, does it?" said the man.

They were still discussing the conduct and character of their employers when the bell rang, and Mrs. Drayton returned.

"Shouldn't be a bit surprised if they had a 'set to' to-night," said the observant Albert.

Constance Drayton wondered to find that her husband was back first. He was standing at the dining-room door when she entered, and said:

"I should like to say something to you."

She followed him into the room. He closed the door.

"Your father honoured me with a call to-day at the club," Drayton began. "He gave me a commission and a warning."

"What was the commission?" she asked rather icily, for she divined the truculence behind the assumed quietness of his manner.

"The colonel, who won't know the young Gordon himself on account of papa, the bookmaker, seems to think that we've adopted him as a sort of tame cat about the house, don't you know; and he wishes me to thank your friend for preventing him putting his foot into it, over that rotten company which has just come a cropper. Now it happens that I haven't seen Gordon since he was trying to spoon—I beg your pardon; I'll try to talk French—since he was a *pretendant* of yours in Rutland Square. I thought

it better (you'll guess why!) to accept the gay youth as a friend of the family, instead of putting the whole responsibility for him on your shoulders."

"There is not the faintest reason why you should be troubled in this," she said. "I have already told Philip Gordon of my father's gratitude. He is an old friend of mine and perfectly understands."

"That's a good deal more than I do, then!" said he. "If it is absolutely necessary—and judging from the ladies of your set it is—to have a pet young man, I must ask you to choose another."

His wife answered without raising her voice :

"Please understand that I take orders from no one. It is probable that I shall often meet Mr. Gordon. He was dining last night at the Stewarts'. He took me in to dinner. Next week I shall meet him at Lady Belchester's."

"So that lot have taken him up, have they?" interrupted Drayton. "Good Lord! what next?"

She ignored his offensive interruption and resumed :

"There is no secrecy whatever in my acquaintance with Mr. Gordon. I thought we had agreed to choose our own friends—our tastes are very different. You must have noticed I have never been curious about yours. There must be an equality in these things."

"Must there!" he exclaimed savagely.

"There shall be in our case," she replied, now showing signs of emotion in her voice; "only

I can be trusted to remember what is due to myself."

He felt stung all over, thrust back, as it were, by points of invisible steel. This was a woman whom it was hopeless to bully.

"Will you swear he isn't your lover?" he cried.

"I have no lover—now," she answered.

They had reached the limit, but he knew that he had not won.

She remained standing near the table, and half mechanically began to re-arrange the roses in a Japanese bowl before her.

"It seems to me," she said at last, looking across to him, as he stood sullenly under a great landscape representing peasants burning weeds, "it seems to me that we have begun a very ridiculous conversation. Candidly, don't you think such scenes as these rather silly?"


"If you'll promise not to make a fool of yourself with that young Gordon, I'll shut up," he said offensively.

"Your manners certainly don't encourage the respectful wifely attitude you seem to claim. I have already told you that you can trust me."

"Why wasn't I told of young Gordon?"

"Because there was nothing to tell; and, remember, I exact no pledges. I have not even asked you where you spend your evenings."

"Simply because you don't care a damn," he answered.



As she looked at him she wondered whether she did. The fact that he had dined unrestrainedly was visible on his face.

"I am tired," she said. "Wrangling is absurd. You'll be more reasonable in the morning. I thought you had something to say. Of all our silly conversations the one you can't finish is the silliest."

Instead of defending herself she had attacked him. He felt she was in every way too quick for him. He knew she was virtuous and dauntless, and—hardest of all for his vanity—he knew, too, that she had ceased to care for him. Looking back he doubted whether she ever had. He had sworn to himself to "have it out with her." The result was that she had laughed at him!

She would give him a chance some day, perhaps, if he allowed her rope enough! Conjugal vindictiveness is best provoked after jealousy by contempt.

Drayton lit a cigar with an air of indifference. He wished to impress his wife with the idea that having "said his say," he considered that the incident had reached its logical ending.

She was moving, a little wearily, towards the door, when she turned, and said:

"But surely my father had some other reason for calling on you besides desiring you to convey unnecessary thanks to Mr. Gordon?"

Drayton puffed at his cigar grimly a moment.

"Oh, yes," he said, "he actually fancies we don't get on. He even promised to call you over the



coals, only I made him understand we both preferred fighting on our own account. He didn't seem very satisfied, however, and went away—rather sulky, I thought.”

“Papa sulky? Impossible! You must be describing how you felt. However, I'm sure you dispelled his illusions on our—want of sympathy shall I call it?”

Then, without looking back, she left the room. He heard the rustle of her skirts mounting the stairs. But he remained in the dining-room trying to think, and he thought,—“I understand how a fellow feels when he thrashes a woman!”—nor could his imagination carry him farther.

## CHAPTER XVII

WHEN Mortimer Gordon saw that Colonel Madryn had walked out of the trap which Mr. Black and the "Virgin Land" had prepared for him, and even won a reputation for honourable shrewdness by that simple feat of enforced discretion, he was exceedingly disappointed, and said to himself, "He ain't such a fool as I thought."

He was still far from attributing the colonel's rescue to his son's help.

Philip Gordon never spoke of the Madryns or Draytons to his father.

To explain his hatred of the colonel old Gordon would have been obliged to tell two stories which he was anxious to keep to himself; consequently, when he did run amuck, he took care that Philip was not a witness.

Moreover, he was watching his son admiringly; when he perceived that "the Belchester lot" had taken him up he bragged a good deal to his friends.

"Phil's in with quite the best set," he said. "Of course you know who Lady Belchester is?"

Whether they did or not he told them, like the simple British snob he was, but without knowing

that his enemy's daughter was an old friend of the brilliant young women once famous as the "beautiful Miss Rodericks."

He attributed the social success of his son openly to the fact that "Phil was a rising man," secretly to the power of his own money.

"They can't very well take me up," he reflected, "but they can't leave him out. Why! when I'm gone Phil will be able to buy some of 'em out twice over."

He saw no humorous side to a state of mind commoner in men of his class and character than is admitted. But an unpleasant surprise was in store for him. It came to him through his neighbour, Mr. Cone, with whom he chanced to drive back one afternoon from the city. The conversation naturally turned to the affairs of the "Virgin Land Company" at that moment held up in the papers to trusting investors as an example of reckless speculation.

"Let 'em burn their fingers is what I say," observed the knowing Mortimer complacently. "It's the only way they learn."

"It seems Colonel Madryn would have burnt his pretty badly if it hadn't been for your son," Mr. Cone remarked, under the impression he was telling a flattering tale.

Mortimer was startled but concealed his uneasiness under his desire for knowledge.

"Why! what's Phil got to do with it?" he inquired, as mildly as he could.

"Haven't you heard?" asked Mr. Cone.

"No. If Phil does a thing he doesn't brag of it to me. Phil's like me, he is."

"Well, they say your son put Colonel Madryn off the 'Virgin Land.'"

"But Phil don't know him, and don't want to," growled Mortimer.

"It seems he got at the colonel through Mrs. Drayton," said Mr. Cone, wondering why the old man looked so ferocious.

"Oh!" grunted Mortimer, feeling he had discussed the matter far enough with his neighbour. "Wonder I never heard before!"

"I daresay it's only gossip," said Mr. Cone, oppressed by Mortimer's scowl.

"Said the wrong thing to the old chap," he thought, as he left the cab at his corner of the Square.

Mortimer Gordon walked into his house with an explanation for the colonel's escape which stung him as the gadfly stung Io. To the perverted sense of what he regarded as honourable conduct it seemed that his son had deceived him.

He had looked forward to the colonel's downfall with malicious glee. Now, thanks to Philip, his enemy was "strutting about prouder than ever."

"Mr. Phil in?" he asked of the servant.

Mr. Philip was in but dining out.

"Tell him to come and speak to me in here," growled Mortimer, stepping into the room—all red morocco and sporting pictures—called his study.

Philip and Mortimer Gordon never quarrelled because the former took some trouble to manage his father. He knew what amused and what bored him, and steered him off inflammatory topics. Unconsciously, for the last ten years, the son had been civilising the father, but the polish was so thin that a scratch revealed the savage. His morals—and his manners, such as they were—depended on those well-balanced equable moments which the successful management of money prolongs into periods.

Philip, who was reading in his room, went downstairs quite unprepared for the old man's frown.

"Why! what's the matter?" he asked, unconscious of offence.

In the middle of the hearthrug of crimson pile, his back to the empty grate of blood-red tiles, Mortimer Gordon was standing with his ugliest look on his face.

"You're a pretty chap to turn on your father!" he began.

"What on earth do you mean?" exclaimed his son.

"What do I mean? What the h— d'you mean, by telling old Madryn to have nothin' to do with that company?"

The thick oaths rattled and flashed in his speech with all the vigour and untrammelled spontaneity of his earlier days.

"Upon my honour," said his son, "I can't see the slightest reason for swearing at me. I have not

spoken to Colonel Madryn for four years; but I happen to be one of Mrs. Drayton's friends. She consulted me about the 'Virgin Land Company,' and I told her what I thought of it,—also what you thought of it——”

“Well I'm d——d!” cried his father.

“Also what Locksley thought of it. Colonel Madryn followed the advice which his daughter conveyed to him.”

“You used my name, then?” bawled the old man, purple with anger. “You used my name?”

“I thought it might carry weight with Colonel Madryn.”

“I'd sooner see Madryn in h— than lift a finger to help him out. He passes me in the street as though I was a b——d sandwich-board-man, and you—like the infernal, interfering, spoilt puppy you are!—must needs go and chuck me at him. ‘Mortimer Gordon don't believe in the “Virgin Land,” Mrs. Drayton. You tell your father that! That'll keep 'im out of it, if anything will.’ I can see yer mincin', and flatterin', and fawnin'! What d'yer expect, I shud like to know, from a confounded, poverty-stricken chap like Madryn, of Pentash, who looks at you as though you -wasn't good enough to walk on the same side o' the street with him?”

Years ago, as a lad, he had heard Peter Davies say:

“Whatever you do, don't offend Mortimer Gordon!

He never forgives a man till he's made him eat dirt."

Thirteen years later, standing in pained astonishment before this exhibition of unreasoning anger, Philip remembered this.

"I had no idea you felt so strongly in this matter," he said mildly. "If I had I should have consulted you before advising Mrs. Drayton. But the time was short, Mrs. Drayton anxious, and so I did what I thought right."

"Don't try to come your superior d——d college-an'-club airs over me, sir. I'll not stand 'em. Who made you, I should like to know?"

"If you can't control yourself, sir," replied the son, "I shall be in danger of forgetting."

"Forget an' be hanged to you! I can do what I like with my money—when it comes to forgetting."

But the young man felt it was ridiculous to appear apologetic or submissive.

"I think you have said enough, sir," he answered resolutely, looking straight into the old man's blood-shot eyes. "We had better defer this dispute till we are both prepared to be patient. I'm unaccustomed to be bullied!"

"You're a stuck-up, spoilt puppy," his father shouted, as Philip left the room, "that wants licking into shape!"

The young man groaned in spirit. He was paying the price of his father.

On his way to his room he met Mrs. Wetherley-

Scott who, from the landing above, had been startled by the thundering voice of the old tyrant.

"Oh, Mr. Philip!" she exclaimed, "I thought it must have been one of the servants. I *am* so sorry."

"I'm afraid I was the offender this time," said Philip. "We've had a little misunderstanding."

Mrs. Scott was fond of Philip. Her duties were congenial when he was at home. He was, she said, always charming to her. She saw more of what was going on in the house than she pretended. Most of the gossip of the Square reached her through Mrs. Parkington, who, still retaining hopes of young Gordon for her youngest unmarried daughter, sought a possible ally in the lady who presided over his father's household.

Through Mrs. Parkington, Mrs. Scott had heard of "poor young Mr. Gordon's unfortunate attachment" to Mrs. Drayton, and had agreed that a suitable marriage was the only remedy for such "dangerous folly."

Moreover, old Gordon had not concealed his savage resentment against the Madryns from Mrs. Scott who, from her outpost on the landing, in spite of her assumption of ignorance, had acquired a fairly accurate idea of the nature of the quarrel.

It was Mrs. Wetherley-Scott who induced Mortimer to rent a pew in St. Peter's Church; it was Mrs. Wetherley-Scott who had made him realise the social and spiritual comfort of subscriptions to local charities properly advertised in parish magazines.



This raging at his son was the most regrettable backsliding ; but how dare she reprove it ? The old tyrant was capable of flinging her boxes after her into the street.

When Philip Gordon shut the door of his room Mrs. Scott went downstairs to reconnoitre, and seized the opportunity of telling a servant outside Mortimer's door—she could hear him grumbling to himself within—that “Mr. Philip was dining out.” She hoped this information might induce the old gentleman to ask where. Her confidence was rewarded.

The door opened. Mortimer said, “Step in please, Mrs. Scott.”

She perceived that his face was redder than usual.

“All this excitement must be very bad for him,” she thought. “He is a very free liver, and will end in having ‘an attack’.”

“It seems my son is dining out,” he said ; “d’you happen to know where ?”

She noticed that he said “son” instead of “Phil,”—his favourite topic with her—and that he had struggled back into his best English. This she took as an encouraging sign.

She knew Philip was dining at a fashionable restaurant and that Mr. Locksley was his host. The evening before she had complained of headache, and the young man had brought her some new novels, remaining with her a few minutes chatting amiably. It was owing to this visit that she had acquired the

information which she now proceeded to impart—as a corrective, she hoped—to his turbulent father.

“I think,” she replied, in her most matter-of-fact manner, “they dine at the ‘Royal England’.”

“I didn’t know it was opened,” said he.

“Mr. Philip said it was opened the day before yesterday.”

“Who’s giving the dinner? d’yer happen to know?”

“Mr. Locksley.”

“My son seems to confide in you a good deal,” said Gordon resentfully.

“You were out last night,” she said, pursuing her simple plan, “and I happened to have one of my headaches. Mr. Philip, who is most considerate, brought me some new books, and tried to make me forget it. That’s how I heard of the dinner-party! Fancy bothering about a dull old woman like me, Mr. Gordon!”

“I don’t see anything wonderful in that,” said Mortimer grimly, “so long as a young chap can talk about himself, and brag about his swell friends, he doesn’t much mind who listens. But did he happen to say who the other guests were?”

“Yes,” she said, ignoring the slight which she perceived was unintentional, “Lady Belchester is one of them, and her sister, Mrs. Stewart, is another.”

“What, the wife of that beef-extract man?”

“I think Mr. Stewart is connected with some

such lucrative enterprise. Then Lord Carding is another——”

“Not the member of the Cabinet?”

“Yes, I think so.”

Mortimer was impressed.

It seemed ridiculous to be father of, and to quarrel with, a son who met men like Lord Carding at dinner!

“D’you happen to know whether a Mrs. Drayton is dining there too?” asked Mortimer.

“I don’t know, but Mrs. Drayton, Mrs. Stewart, and her sister, Lady Belchester, are very great friends—schoolfellows, in fact, so it is not unlikely. Mrs. Parkington told me so in the Square yesterday.”

“Oh,” said he abruptly, “oh!”

He had acquired all the information he wanted. The friendship between the Stewarts, Belchesters, and Draytons threw new light on his son’s conduct.

Suppose the boy were in love with Mrs. Drayton—every one knew she and Drayton didn’t get on. Well! wouldn’t that account for this unfilial conduct in going against his father?

He would go over to Kensington, ask Peter Davies to give him dinner, and find out what he thought or knew of these goings on.

Mrs. Wetherley-Scott was still standing at the door, as though expecting him to speak.

“Shan’t be in to dinner this evening,” he said; “suddenly remembered an engagement, Mrs. Scott.”

But as he never sought friends outside his business, it was worth no one's while to inquire closely into his domestic secrets ; consequently Mr. and Mrs. Davies lived in their handsome flat in extreme comfort and complete indifference to outside opinion. But although the world knew little of Peter Davies, he possessed more accurate information concerning the affairs of other people than any professional man in London. Even Mortimer had been heard to declare, with greater display of modesty than of grammar, "I don't mind saying Peter Davies is a better judge of a rogue than me!"

A swift lift shot old Gordon up to his friend's door. The servant showed him into a square, lavishly decorated room, where Peter was sitting in a neat dinner-jacket and black tie above a glazed shirt-front, reading the list of failures in the day's *Times*.

"Pete!" said Mortimer, "I'm in trouble."

"No!" said the other. "Sit down."

"Yes; an' I've come to ask you to give me a bit o' dinner."

"Delighted, I'm sure! So'll the missus be. Sit down and tell me about it. She's in her room putting on the war paint."

Mortimer then gave a version of his quarrel with his son, in which facts were blindly subordinated to feeling.

Unbeknown to him—"unbeknown" was the most solemn word in Mortimer's vocabulary—unbeknown to him, Phil had been toadying that Madryn lot! Why! if it hadn't been for what he, Mortimer,

told his son, 'Madryn, o' Pentash' would have been swallowed up in that 'Virgin Land' swindle."

But it chanced that Davies had heard from Locksley something of the other side.

"Phil doesn't know Colonel Madryn," said he.

"Who said he did?" replied Mortimer, who wanted sympathy, not argument; "but he got at him through the daughter, Mrs. Drayton."

"Look here, Mortimer," said Davies, "you've got hold of the wrong end of the stick. I happen to know something of what's been going on. Phil was asked by a certain lady what he thought of a certain company. Phil makes inquiries among his friends. The result is that the lady's father shies at the said company, and the said lady rewards the said gentleman—they do say in the usual manner. That's the true history of the case."

"Is it?" said Mortimer. "I put Black on Madryn, as Phil knew."

"Then you oughtn't to have told him, knowing as you do what he thought of the girl. His bringing up was different to yours and mine, Mortimer; and you oughtn't to have tempted him to go against you as you did. You've no case."

"What d'yer mean, Davies? No case indeed! Hasn't my son gone against his father to help the man who called him a leg?"

"That was thirty years ago!"

"If it was thirty hundred, it wouldn't have made his doing what he has done different."

"Then it ought. The young woman was pretty nearly your daughter-in-law, and they do say she's sorry she isn't." Davies launched this flattering shaft to soothe his friend.

"I dessay she is," said Gordon. "That doesn't alter Phil's treatment o' me, and I've made the young pup understand what I think of him. And dash me, Peter! I can't see why the deuce you're on his side."

"If you did see, you'd be on his side too," said Davies. "Now if you had gone to Phil and said, 'Now look here, Phil, Colonel Madryn called me a leg thirty years ago, when I was in a different line of business, and if you ever have a chance of doing him a bad turn, I shall expect you to do it,' it might have been different. But you keep your grievance to yourself, let the young chap fall in love with your enemy's daughter after doing all you can to encourage it, and when he behaves like a gentleman for the sake of the girl whom he is still fond of—Why! then you round on him and tell him—the deuce knows what you've told him."

"I came to you for advice, Davies, not to hear a speech," growled Gordon.

"I'm coming to the advice. I was just showing how the business struck a man of sense."

"Why didn't he tell me he was thick with the Madryn lot, Davies? That's what I want to know."

"Why didn't he confide in you, Mortimer? You're getting soft, old chap! Can't you see? Phil's fond of the girl who isn't happy with Drayton?"

"What did she want to marry him for then? She might have had Phil."

"Phil was too late. Luck was against 'em. You know what that means, Mortimer. But they do say—mind, I'm only talking their scandal—she's pretty anxious to make it up to him now."

This aspect of the case had the effect on Mortimer's temper that oil has on waves.

"How did you hear all this?" asked Mortimer.

"I know what goes on because I keep my eyes open," said Davies.

In this case it was only partly true. Davies was legal adviser to the London branch of the "Home Counties Mutual Assurance Society," whose chief business consisted in making advances to small people in need of "temporary financial assistance."

It chanced that Albert Dawkins, Drayton's valet, in trouble over a betting transaction, had applied to the Society. This had brought him into contact with Peter Davies, who, as soon as he found out who the man was, decided that he might be made useful. Albert had no guarantee beyond "the word of a gentleman" to offer, but Davies—although unable to advise the Society to accept this client on such security—undertook the case himself, and advanced Dawkins £50, for which the latter was to repay £65 in monthly instalments of £5.

The whole of the instalment was never forthcoming; but on the appointed day, Albert appeared with a portion of it, and, in order to propitiate his creditor,

gossiped with the most amusing candour of the affairs of his master and master's wife. Thus Davies was one of the few men in London, besides Albert, who knew who Mrs. Frank Ravenswood, of 29, Flora Dale, Kensington, W. (with the Hammersmith post-mark), really was. He also knew that Mrs. Drayton corresponded (in secret according to Albert) with Philip Gordon, and that she kept his photograph in her writing-case, with a date inscribed on it. Peter Davies consequently felt himself in a very strong position for advising his old friend.

"Yes, I know what goes on Mortimer," he repeated, "because I keep my eyes open; and I don't mind telling you there'll be a nice rumpus at a certain very smart house in Sloane Square, in which you're interested."

"You don't say so!" exclaimed old Gordon, sniffing the humiliation of his enemy's daughter from afar.

"The gentleman has another establishment," said Davies.

Mortimer swore an oath which sounded like a jubilant war-cry.

"And the lady is supposed to be in love with Phil Gordon—suspected, mind you, only."

"But how d'you know, Peter?"

"Because I shouldn't tell you if it wasn't. I can vouch for the lady and a secret establishment; the rest is only on the cards so far."

"God bless my soul!" exclaimed Mortimer.



But at this point Mrs. Davies—a tall, well-developed lady with fair hair and a generous display of neck and arms, dressed in claret-coloured satin, and adorned with diamonds—appeared to welcome her husband's most valuable client.

"She knew you were coming, Mortimer; didn't you, Bess?" said the playful Pete, smiling towards his resplendent lady.

"No, Pete, I didn't," said she. "If I had, Mr. Gordon should have had a better dinner."

"The chap who asks himself to dine with you deserves the worst he gets," said the gallant Mortimer; "and your worst, Mrs. Pete, is more than the best of us deserve."

It is not flattering to humanity that the misfortunes of enemies should frequently exert the same cheering influence on us as our own successes.

Old Gordon was quite willing to forgive his son, and even to admit that he "might have been hasty," now that he was able to believe that Colonel Madryn's daughter was unhappily married and seeking consolation in his son.

In consequence of this suspicion he made a very excellent dinner, and consumed nearly a bottle of his friend's old port, besides the greater part of a magnum of champagne.

But Peter Davies knew that it was neither his conversation, nor his wife's diamonds and restful dulness, nor yet his wine that had restored Mortimer to his better temper.

"He always was a good hater," Peter reflected. "If he only loved his friends as well as he hates the men who offend him, one side of him wouldn't be very far off what they pretend a real Christian is."

But Peter Davies, as his odd, shrewd, Semitic eyes testified, had only studied Christians from a fixed point well without the circle of their faith. A fine specimen of the materialist he accepted good haters as a wholesome necessity in the retaliatory scheme of the moral world.

He had played an interesting experiment on old Gordon, and the success of it had pleased him.

"The old chap," he reflected, with an inward chuckle, "is as wicked as he was thirty years ago"; and he admired him for his vigour.

Locksley's dinner was a great success. Philip Gordon's seat was next to Mrs. Drayton's. Whenever he met her at Mrs. Stewart's, Lady Belchester's, or Lady Angmering's he found that, by tacit consent, she was allotted to him. It was the custom in this pleasant and unconventional set to pair men and women in accordance with their individual tastes, "for," as Mrs. Stewart said, "a kind hostess endeavours to readjust the balances, even if the Church itself has fixed them."

They were almost as much at their ease, and even as innocent, although with a subtle difference, as they had been years ago in Switzerland. She was doing her best to show her gratitude, convinced he would

never misinterpret her meaning. Here was a man to whom she could trust her friendship! In it she found a support—she had never felt it before—and mistook it for passionless sympathy.

“What do you and Philip Gordon say to each other?” Mrs. Stewart once playfully asked.

“He talks to me much as he might speak to a man who was his friend,” she answered.

“Innocent ducks!” thought the diverted lady.

Mrs. Stewart conveyed this confession to her sisters who were helping her watch Drayton, as silken sirens might watch some idiot sailor rowing for their rocks, blind to danger.

“The wretched Bluebeard with his stupid contempt for women,” said Lady Belchester, “deserves far more than he is ever likely to get.”

“Do you imagine that Connie Drayton knows *all* about her Bluebeard?” asked Lady Angmering.

“She tries not to see things,” replied Mrs. Stewart. “Her patience makes me wicked. If he had only married me! I can’t understand her. With her spirit and pride, too!”

But mysterious signals sometimes flash in the dark. When Mrs. Stewart looked across the table at Mrs. Drayton, and inquired after the “Master of Ravenswood,” Philip Gordon beheld one. It was obviously a question needing no reply, but some one asked, “Who is the Master of Ravenswood?”

And Mrs. Stewart replied:

“A gentleman who walked into the quicksands

and lost his feather. And that's a parable, isn't it, Connie?"

"It may be," Mrs. Drayton replied.

And Philip Gordon suspected a smile, with half a meaning in it, on the face of more than one guest. But when the party broke up, Philip Gordon walked home to Rutland Square in a self-censuring mood. For the first time in his life he was conscious of drifting. To what was his feeling for Constance Drayton leading him? He had had a serious, if absurd, quarrel with his father; yet, because his evening had been spent with the one woman in whom he delighted, he had entirely forgotten it. This indifference to all things else measured the depth of this feeling. So long as he saw her, nothing mattered; but he did not mistake his weakness, as some men have done, for philosophy.

"What a commonplace ass, I am!" he reflected. "What is the good of playing at being the friend of a married woman?"

Although he was wandering aimlessly in a circle, every time he returned to the same point in the curve of his weakness he was conscious of it.

The night was cool; the wind across the trees and moist turf of the park fragrant with the scent of the wholesome world. The dark sky and pale stars sent him the message some of us mistake for faith:

"Don't think," they said; "wait for what happens."

Behind the silence the great wheel of change is turning."

Before he realised it, his latch-key was in his father's door; in the dining-room his father was waiting.

"Hullo, Phil," said the gruff voice, but with all the anger gone from it, "didn't expect you home so soon, but wanted to see you before I went to bed. It seems we had something like a quarrel."

Wondering at this sudden return to reason, the young man replied gently :

"I'm afraid, sir, you found me most exasperating. Sons generally are, or I'm sure you wouldn't have scolded me so !"

"The fact was, Phil, I didn't understand," said Mortimer; "but I dined with Peter Davies to-night."

But this did not seem sufficient reason for the change. Philip's face inquired for an explanation.

"Poor old Madryn!" exclaimed his father, "and his pride, too! It's d——d hard! It is indeed! If I'd known what, of course, you, as Mrs. Drayton's friend and adviser, must know, I shouldn't 'a' rounded on you as I did."

"What on earth do you mean?" Philip asked, detecting badly concealed enjoyment under affected pity.

"You might have confided in me, Phil," resumed the old fellow, with an injured air. "I might 'a' helped. Fancy that fellow Drayton being such a scoundrel."

Well, well ! a man never knows what sort of son-in-law the devil may send him ! ”

“ On my honour, I don’t understand you ! ”

“ D’you mean to tell me you never heard of Mr. and Mrs. Ravenswood an’ the little place over at Flora Dale, Hammersmith ? More like a story in a funny play than anything else, and enough to make a chap laugh his head off, if it wasn’t for the poor deceived wife ! You don’t suppose, Phil (for you must have had a chance of finding out), that she knows of these goings on ? ”

“ I know nothing, sir. Tell me, for goodness’ sake, what Peter Davies told you. ”

Mortimer noted the young man’s agitation and told his story with customary coarseness.

“ You see, Phil, ” he said, with visible relish, in conclusion, “ old Madryn ain’t heard o’ this little game yet ; an’ the poor wife ain’t heard either—at least, according to you. It might be worth your while as her pal to tell her—you understand what I mean ? If there’s a row, Drayton won’t have a leg to stand on ; and as for the colonel, well, though I am sorry for him, he must take the risks like other fathers who give their daughters to chaps, just because they happen to have a little money. What the classes are coming to with this sort of thing goin’ on is more than I can say ! Fancy old Madryn when he hears of it ! Will he shoot the chap, or square the scandal to keep the name out o’ the gutter ? ”

The old man emitted a sort of ferocious chuckle

as he watched the agitated face of his son, wondering at a silence when he had expected an indignant outburst.

"Seems to me," he added after a pause, "that you must have been a bit of a mug not to see what was going on. However, you needn't look so d——d glum. Your course is clear. You'll have to console the lady! She'll need it! They do say she's nuts on you—don't scowl at me, man, I'm only repeating what Peter told me; and that's part of the gossip, he didn't pretend it wasn't. Some fathers would say this wasn't a nice thing to see a son mixed up with, but what I say, Phil, is this. If it leads to trouble—in the Courts, I mean, a big scandal and all that sort o' thing—why, I'll pay the score. You don't want me to put it plainer than that. The girl jilted you once. It's our turn now! You get what fun you can out of it and blow the expense."

Philip Gordon fully realised now why his father had forgiven him for saving Colonel Madryn from his trap.

"I needn't tell you, Phil, as a lawyer," the old man added, with another wicked chuckle, "that when both of 'em kick over the traces the law doesn't turn either out to graze again."

"You have a wonderful grip of the case, sir," said his son contemptuously, "and I'll think over what you have said. Good-night!"

He left the room, closing the door.

Old Gordon was not surprised that he had

offended his son. He boasted of being a man who called a spade a spade ; and thought that, whatever high-flown phrases his son might apply to the situation to make it look less sordid, the issues must be the same.

“Phil’s in the hands of the girl. She’ll pay the husband out in good time, and where’ll old Madryn be then?”

And so he chuckled himself off to bed !



## CHAPTER XIX

PHILIP GORDON, coming down to breakfast after a sleepless night, found Mrs. Wetherley-Scott ready to pour out his tea. He was relieved to see on a tray the toast and carefully grilled bacon on which the old gentleman broke his never prolonged fast.

"Thank goodness I shan't run against him yet!" he reflected, still shaken by the series of shocks dealt by his rude father.

But he was too reasonable to pity himself for a parent whose brutal vigour undermined the sense of filial piety. The old man had been brought up in a school which doubts the very existence of the higher morals, although it may assume them for momentary and purely decorative uses. In old Gordon's eyes the virtues were merely envelopes enwrapping human dealings, the sum of which represented the natural desire of one man to get the better of another. Such a father was not inspiring, except, perhaps, as a sort of moral helot—as an example to be avoided.

The line of conduct the callous old man had suggested shocked Philip Gordon to the very centre of his moral sense. The effect of it was to make him determined to champion, so far as he could, the

woman threatened with the humiliation which marital infidelity bears in its sordid train. There was no sacrifice that he was not willing to make for her. But what could he do? Action seemed impossible until after the foul storm had burst.

"I was so glad to hear from your father's voice as he went upstairs last night," said Mrs. Scott, looking at the pensive young man pretending to eat his breakfast, "that he was in a reasonable frame of mind again."

"Yes; he had quite recovered," said Philip.

"I feel sure he heard something last night which pleased him!" said Mrs. Scott.

"He did," replied Philip grimly.

"He questioned me about you last night," she resumed confidently; "and when he heard you were to meet Lord Carding he seemed pleased."

"Lord Carding was kept away by official business," said he.

"What a pity! Mr. Gordon also asked me whether you were to meet Mrs. Drayton, and I said I thought it likely."

"She was at the dinner. What did my father say?"

"Simply 'oh!' It meant he had had enough of my gossip, you know."

Philip rose from his chair and walked to the window. The day was fine; the Square bathed in sunshine. Over the bushes he could see Colonel Madryn, in a Panama hat, strolling quietly in the

peace of the morning across the freshly cut turf. The stately old gentleman stopped and examined now a flower, now the laburnum-tree still bearing its last blossom. The golden tassels stirred in the soft wind.

Mrs. Scott rose, too, and looked on the Square.

"It's a lovely morning," she said, "and there's the colonel."

"He's a splendid old fellow!" answered Philip half to himself.

When he turned away from the window she saw that his eyes were full of regret. The look touched her, and she said :

"My dear! what's the matter? You have always been kind to me and I should like to be a help to you, too—if I could. Remember I see more of what goes on than some of you think. I feel you are not happy."

She had laid her hand on his arm, and it rested there almost caressingly, whilst he answered.

"I am worried," he admitted; "but not about myself."

"I'm sure of that!" she said.

"But I'm afraid my father might take some step—some step we might all regret."

"I understand," she said; "and I'll help you all I can."

Here the conversation with its half-confidences ended; Philip started to walk to the Temple; Mrs. Scott remained at the window trying to piece the hints which his manner, more than his words, had

conveyed into some distant suggestion that old Gordon was acting like a purse-proud, coarse, revengeful old tyrant.

What was happening between them? Who was the woman? The excitement was interesting, but she was fond of the always gentle and considerate Philip, and ready to help him against his father, even at the risk of the old gentleman showing her the door. As she mused she watched all the movements in the Square. She saw Colonel Madryn cross the long narrow lawn in the direction of his own house, and the children and nursemaids take possession of the place; she saw two young ladies commence a perfunctory game of tennis; nor did she stir till the servants came to clear, and old Gordon's voice on the landing reminded her that it was better not to meet him until he had read the papers, and acquired the more equitable mood that midday encourages in old men who have dined recklessly on the previous evening.

When he was safe in his own room with the newspapers she escaped to upper regions, beyond the authoritative growl of his voice. Often she did not meet him till dinner-time—an arrangement which she preferred—but that genial summer morning, with the smell of fresh-cut grass entering at the open windows, she received a summons to parley.

Mr. Gordon would be greatly obliged if Mrs. Scott would speak with him in the study as soon as she was at leisure. She received the message with a

feeling that he had something unpleasant to say ; but Green, old Gordon's man, in whom in certain moods he confided, said assuringly :

"He's in quite a good temper, ma'am ; it's about Mr. Philip."

She found the old man in his favourite frame of red morocco, and he begged her in his best manner—not yesterday's—to sit down.

"I didn't see Philip before he left," said he conversationally. "I was late last night ; when I'm late I take it out in the morning. Neither of us are so young as we used to be, Mrs. Scott, although certainly you look it."

She might have informed him that she was fifteen years his junior, but she said instead, with a complacency fitted to the situation, that they both had reason to be grateful for excellent health and robust constitutions.

The ceremonials thus over, Mortimer came to the point.

"Look here, Mrs. Scott, you're a friend o' Phil's."

"I'm very fond of him. He is always charming."

"That's what the fair sex gen'rally think," said Gordon playfully ; "but he's like the rest of 'em—with the petticoat, I mean."

The reference to the petticoats made the poor lady uncomfortable, but she concealed her nervousness under the obvious statement that young men would be young men.

"That's the worst of it, Mrs. Scott," said he ; "and

I don't mind telling you, I'm a bit anxious about Phil."

"So far as I know, you have absolutely no cause," she said.

Gordon shook his head, or, rather, it seemed that his superior knowledge shook it for him.

"There is a lady in the case," he answered, "and a married lady, too. I'm told he's in love with Mrs. Drayton—daughter o' Colonel Madryn, o' Pentash."

He rolled out the names with careless pomp, that advertised his enjoyment of them.

Mrs. Scott now forgot to be nervous.

"Mrs. Drayton's unhappily married," he resumed, "her husband deceives her. Unbeknown to her family—I can't speak for the lady, for one can never be up to their tricks!—and, under the name of Ravenswood, he runs another establishment at Flora Dale, Hammersmith!"

"What a horrible thing!" gasped Mrs. Scott.

"Dreadful, ain't it?" said he. "But the question is how far Phil's mixed up in this."

"I've no idea, only I'd trust him anywhere!" she exclaimed.

"Would you now? I hope we can. He's had quite the best bringing up—nothing spared—school, college, Bar, good society, everything; but human nature's human nature, Mrs. Scott. We can't get over that! Now, what I want you to do is to keep an eye on Phil. You hear a lot o' gossip among the old women which naturally doesn't reach me. Give lots o' tea-

parties, collect the cackle, and, like the friend of the fam'ly you are, an' I'm proud to call you a friend, Mrs. Scott, just let me know what they're all saying. You understand, I'll be bound."

"Perfectly," she said, now all alert. "But is this deplorable story told me in confidence?"

"Well, as to that, Mrs. Scott, you're the best judge. But I shouldn't worry myself about it if I were you. It's likely to be well known all over the place before many days."

"You wicked old man!" was the thought which prompted her answer: "I'm dreadfully sorry for poor Colonel Madryn!"

"So am I, poor old chap!" said Mortimer cheerfully, taking up the *Sporting Life*.

Mrs. Scott took the hint.

"I will tell you everything about this distressing affair that I think you ought to know," she said, rising from her chair.

"That's right, Mrs. Scott," he answered, "we live in a wicked world, but we must make the best of it and look after ourselves."

Mortimer mistook his cunning for diplomacy. "If you want a bit of scandal spread," he had said to himself, "tell it to an old woman!"

He was acting on this principle now.

"It'll be all over the Square this time to-morrow," he thought, with his worst grin; "how the old cats will enjoy it!"

Then he turned to his papers, but the venom, now

set in motion, prevented him from fixing his attention. Misgivings began to vex him. It was possible for the Square to be blue with scandal without it reaching the Madryns. The whole lot of 'em funk'd Madryn, of Pentash! Who'd tell him about "Mr. and Mrs. Ravenswood?" Things like this went on for years without being found out. Besides, suppose the colonel knew already and was winking at it? Suppose the wife knew—and didn't care? Suppose—well—suppose they'd agreed to do as they both liked—these sort of "toffs" weren't like the middle classes, always in a funk of what people might say. Suppose Philip was a sort of balance on the wife's side, to Flora Dale and the husband's little game? There were half a dozen reasons why the Madryns might go on to the end of the chapter, with their noses in the air, ignoring the whole thing. Some of the worst scandals he had ever known had been stifled by the collusive silence of the men and women who were the cause of them.

And thus the doubts began to dance before Mortimer, in mockery it seemed of his vengeance. The only comfort was that he believed his son was ignorant of the situation; consequently, it seemed probable, that the set in which the Drayton's lived, —and a nice lot some of them were!—had also not begun to suspect it.

How would Phil act now that he did know?

Mortimer rose from the red morocco armchair and walked up and down the room. For the first time



in his life he had "a straight tip" which he didn't know how to use properly.

"I'm no better than a mug!" he muttered aloud.

Then he rang the bell.

"Bring my boots!" he shouted when the man came.

Green appeared with a big pair of thick-soled, patent-leather lace boots, shining with varnish and pretension. Whilst these were being laced Mortimer made up his mind. The double operation concluded, the man handed his master the gold-headed cane and tall hat, with a brim suggestive of turf triumphs, and let him out of the front door.

"What mischief is the old 'un up to now?" he wondered.

In the Square a smart hansom, with an eye on Mortimer's impressive hat, captured him as a fare, and bore him off to an ancient haunt of decayed betting men at the back of Fleet Street. Here he met an old, unprosperous and obsequious acquaintance, and drew up the anonymous letters which he now deemed necessary "to make things hum!"

"You see, Dick," said Mortimer, "I want to do the colonel a good turn. They shan't deceive him and his daughter if I can help it."

"You always was a good-hearted cove, you was, Mr. Gordon," said the closely shaved gentleman, who, at his patron's dictation, wielded the pen.

Then, having lent his assistant a sovereign and paid for the three "whiskeys" consumed, Mortimer

dropped the letters in the post and hoped for the best.

"At all events," he reflected, "I ain't left much to chance."

His hat and boots shone with the air of lordly leisure as he walked towards Charing Cross through the sundry hangers-on of the press looking out for a job, and other unsuccessful adventurers of Fleet Street.

## CHAPTER XX

MRS. DRAYTON received at five o'clock the anonymous letter which Mortimer had prepared for her confusion. Written in a meaningless hand, with curly capitals on common paper, it bore the traces of its vulgar literary origin. On the envelope the word "immediate," thrice underlined suggested the circular dispatched periodically to customers by competing coal merchants in the interests of domestic fuel. The opening sentence flung her pride into purgatory.

"A wife is the last to know her husband is deceiving her," said the letter. "Inquire for the character of yours at 29, Flora Dale, Hammersmith, ask for Mrs. Ravenswood who has taken Mr. Drayton's other name. You know what right he has to it. A *friend* and *lover* of justice is sending you this. He asks for no reward. His wish is to see right done. In any case the scandal is too bold and bare-faced to be much longer concealed."

She had never received an anonymous letter before. The rule was, she knew, to treat them with contempt. But the hideous information thus flung at her was supported by her suspicions. The name Ravenswood, given in jest to her husband by Sybil Stewart, had

been whispered about her with derisive meaning, now significant—she had desired not to know. The letter had rendered this impossible.

On one side of the resentful and stricken woman glimmered ghosts of unrealised ideals, that pure breath of innocent life among mountain-tops never reached. On the other—this noisome letter.

She recalled Sybil Stewart's hints. For her husband she had long ago lost all respect. There was nothing in his nature which gave a denial to the accusation; but much in his conduct pointing to its truth. She believed the story even before testing it. Still behind it a hope shone—a hope she was ashamed to encourage. Against such men the law afforded protection. Might not her escape be found in his vices? She had, months ago, suspected evil, but nothing on so wide a scale of depravity as this. She was in a black pit, but overhead was light. The thick atmosphere was bad to breathe, but above the brink, under the blue skies, she might begin life again—free. The thing must be carried through. Her father was out of town—on a brief visit to his tenant at Pentash—whom could she consult? She turned towards Sybil Stewart and the hints underlying her airy chatter. Did Sybil Stewart know? She would find out.

The slanting sunshine lay hot on the pavement of the animated street. There had been an inspection of troops in Hyde Park; in the distance she could hear martial music. At the end of a street her eye

caught the flutter of Lancer pennons topped with bright steel. In her moral world all decorations seemed over-grimed with unclean dust. The sense of distant bustle and brightness encouraged her to action. Behind disgust, pride, and energy stood defiant.

She reached the Stewarts' Gothic red-house, with the carved arched doorway and sinister gargoyles grinning on the street.

Mrs. Stewart had just returned, said the man who showed her into the beautiful drawing-room glowing mellowly with inlaid floor, quiet silken-hangings, and charming water-colour drawings—a cool haven of mingled art and luxury, fragrant with half spiritualised odours of its own.

Sybil Stewart, in light summer draperies which gave her that air of simplicity that only extreme artificiality in millinery attains, entered the room with pretty questioning face.

"Why, what's the matter?" she exclaimed, seeing her friend's set look.

"Read that; and tell me whether it is true," she answered.

Sybil Stewart read it, contracted her delicate eyebrows, then raised them to signify surprise. At that moment to be tragic was beyond her. If the situation demanded tragedy, she commanded none. She saw only a last inevitable act in a comedy.

"Is it true—tell me?" said Mrs. Drayton. "I know you know!"

Yes! complete simplicity was the right *rôle*.

"It's true—every word of it," said Sybil quietly. Then, with all available euphemism, except that she never spared the sinner, she told the story as known to herself and half a dozen of her set.

The injured wife's face at that moment, in spite of its beauty, was scarcely pleasant to look upon. Repressed anger robbed it of all gentler meanings.

"I must soothe her, poor girl!" thought Sybil.

"The fact is, Connie," she said sweetly, "you married an impossible man. You have suffered him as long as endurable, and your chance has come at last."

"But why was I left to find it out like this?"

"Because one can't tell these things. How could one know that you—that——"

"That I didn't know already?—Oh!"

"But you never believed—at least, we all thought you never believed in him."

"Perhaps I didn't; but it's too horrible, bewilderingly horrible, just at first."

"Then look forward, not back. Act, don't think, Connie! Your course is clear."

"How?"

"Leave his house! Only look at him through a lawyer! Commence a suit,"—this onlooker had it all pat!—"a suit for a judicial separation—that's the least they can give you!"

"But my father's at Pentash!"

"Then, come here! Send a letter to your maid

for your clothes and another to him. You'll know what to say! The nurse can bring Frankie tomorrow. 'Mr. Ravenswood' has given you the whip-handle. Don't let go of it "

And so she applied the spur where none was needed, grasping dramatically a situation which her teeming little brain had often anticipated.

Sybil Stewart watched her friend's face. It seemed almost too icy and contemptuous. She even felt that some men, studying the wife's manner, would have seen a dozen excuses for the husband.

"All the woman's fault!" they might have said. "She despised him, never tried to make the best of him, and now she has got what she deserves."

This view was wormwood to Sybil Stewart, who considered her own sex the nobler. She even now discounted it.

"They'll tell you, at least some people will," she said, "that you might have saved him."

"How?" asked the other.

"By toadying him; by letting him walk rough-shod over you. You know how some women try to keep their wretched husbands!"

"I'm not one of those women!" replied the unflinching voice.

Half kindly, half maleficent, yet sustained by real pride of sex, Sybil Stewart felt the glee of the coming conflict. This insupportable Bluebeard, this dull Don Juan, this man whose manner towards women was (for those with eyes to see) one of insufferable

patronage or offensive admiration, had reached his punishment at last ! Already this modern Thracian had flung the bleeding head in "the swift Hebrus ! Suppose that he had married a patient Grizel,—ready to pardon his infidelities and unlace his boots, if his lordship desired !—well, it seemed to this strange woman that the whole of her sex would have smarted under the insult.

"Thank heaven !" she reflected, "Connie Madryn isn't the sort of woman to eat the dirt which some of us devour contentedly for the sake of clothes and a carriage !"

An hour after Mrs. Drayton's arrival the maid had brought a portmanteau to Pont Street ; and the written declaration of war was lying at Sloane Square waiting for Drayton.

It chanced that that much-surfeited gentleman reached his house, from an afternoon of aimless saunterings, earlier than was his wont. He was, in his own simple vocabulary, "sick of everything." Fifteen years of assiduous self-indulgence had crushed the zest out of his "fun." There are natures which cannot attain ornamental idleness. In a lower level he might have made a tolerably efficient policeman or grenadier. Rough work, strict discipline might, in his own words, "have kept him straight." If he had married a different sort of woman it would, he believed, "have been different." He was proud of his wife in a way ; but she didn't care a hang for him or make the slightest effort to amuse him.



"If she means me go my own way," he told himself resentfully, "it will be something more than a supper at the Savoy!"

He knew that there were other ways of punishing a woman than beating her!

The little house, its occupant, the whole of these and other illicit relations, sprang as much from wounded pique as the baser motive. Her pride wanted humbling! Such reflections as these, customary tenants of his dull mind, were vexing him with their buzzings when his wife's letter brought him face to face with her interpretation of his revenge.

"She won't be such a fool as to drive things to extremities," was his first thought; but the other possibility promptly occurred. "She might really want to chuck him. If she did her own social position would suffer; but then you never know what a sulky woman will do."

Drayton was readier to act than to think—if the word can be applied to such instinctive mental processes as his. The case appeared to be one of those which it behoves a man "to square." A part of it—the major part it seemed—was remediable by means of a cheque-book. The traces of his diversions as Mr. Ravenswood might be wiped out. He was, moreover, heartily tired of the siren who had ceased to divert or attract him.

The entanglement was rapidly reaching its natural end. He would assume the sin was an ancient one,

atoned and repented for long ago! Old Madryn might be put off. After all, he was a man of the world. As for his wife,—who to him wrote like a lawyer, without visible sorrow or anger!—even she might prefer reconciliation to a public scandal. For he didn't intend to make it easy for them. There were her letters, and meetings with young Philip Gordon. These didn't look very nice!

At all events he did not intend to be bullied. He'd fight it, if they drove him to it—for all he was worth. Thus, what he regarded as the "sporting spirit" made itself felt in the miserable business.

Spurred by such thoughts as these, armed with his cheque-book and a dogged resolution "to stand no confounded nonsense," he started for Flora Dale, where he was not expected, to "make arrangements."

The situation he discovered there rendered these arrangements easier. An hour's interview, the interchange of some natural abuse, damped by a flood of recriminating tears, assuaged by a healing draught on his bankers, smoothed the way and prepared the ground for the policy he contemplated.

When he left Hammersmith, on his way to the Stewarts' to claim an interview with his wife, the illicit tie had ceased to exist, and the witnesses been bribed to vanish.

It was half-past nine when Drayton rang Mr. Stewart's bell and desired to see Mrs. Drayton. The servant, prepared by his mistress for the visit, showed him into his master's study, the only room in the

house untouched by the original taste of the clever lady who ruled it, a practical room with thick Turkey carpet, obvious decorations, furniture and bookshelves, and a framed address from a sham scientific corporation congratulating the proprietor of "Lactavis" on a victory won in the cause of practical chemistry.

"I daresay," thought Drayton, "they'll send the old fellow to see me."

He disliked Mrs. Stewart, whom he suspected of a desire to "score off" him. It was the lady, however, who appeared. Mr. Stewart was taking the chair at the annual dinner of "the Society for the Diffusion of Practical Knowledge" of which he was president, one of the societies enabling him to believe that there was a public side to his life, a faith necessary for the comfort of not a few prosperous men.

Mrs. Stewart sailed into the room, wearing an evening-dress with suggestions of mourning and with her gravest expression.

Drayton frowned at her.

"Why! won't she see me, Mrs. Stewart?" he exclaimed.

"She absolutely refuses," said Mrs. Stewart. "She has written to Mr. Price and desires me to tell you that all communications must go through her lawyers."

"Oh, I say, Mrs. Stewart," he answered coolly. "Isn't that coming it rather strong? What have the lawyers to do with it?"

"I am Connie's oldest friend," replied Mrs. Stewart, "and will give her any message ; but I repeat she is determined not to see you."

Now what should he do ? It seemed an occasion for conducting himself as the complete man of the world. The type he copied has been brought to perfection in a popular journal printed on pink paper.

"But why won't she see me ?" he repeated.

Mrs. Stewart, who so far had enjoyed the interview, made a half-contemptuous movement with her hands deprecating his dulness, and replied :

"Can you ask ?"

"I'm so dense that I'm afraid I must."

"She knows all about you."

"She doesn't, or she wouldn't have run away from me. I suppose she has tried to make you believe I've treated her like a brute ? I know what women say about a fellow found out in a little slip !"

"A slip ?" said Mrs. Stewart, raising her brows.

"Call it whatever you like. I'll try to talk French, it sounds prettier. My wife has discovered a *péché de jeunesse* ! The tie was broken long ago. It isn't fair to fling a man's past at him ! This is no case for the courts, and you, as my wife's oldest friend, ought to make her understand that. There is evidence enough—gossip, servants' chatter, and all that sort of thing—for a very ugly scandal ; but, if it comes to fighting, the show up won't be all on one side !"

His manner was menacing ; Mrs. Stewart was

ceasing to be amused. He played his part shockingly!

"Surely Connie can't have been indiscreet," was the first thought which flashed across the lady's quick brain; the second was, "The man is a perfect cad!"

"I did hope, after the great wrong you have done her, that you would make all the amends in your power," she answered.

"What! Run away and give her a clear field? Is it likely? What I am anxious to do is to hush it up, for the sake of the two families. I'm sorry for what has happened and I'll run straight in future and—for the balance isn't all on one side—overlook any little indiscretions on my wife's part. But for us to make a serious affair of this is too stupid! Ask Mr. Stewart, ask Lord Angmering, or any one you like."

He spoke with an air of stupid conviction that almost baffled her.

"It isn't," he continued, "as though we had been so devoted. You know what we are like. Just the average couple, not always running smoothly together in double harness, but muddling along somehow! To talk of the Law Courts and of not living under the same roof with me—as though I ever interfered with her!—is simply abject rot, and I am astonished a woman of your cleverness and knowledge of the world,—excuse me for saying so!—should encourage it."

"Oh, the vulgar, vulgar brute!" she thought as she heard him,

She answered in her most impressive manner, trying vainly to lift the treatment of the subject to a loftier plane.

"When your wife sought refuge with me, Mr. Drayton——"

But he interrupted her with something resembling a laugh.

"Sought refuge! Hang it all, Mrs. Stewart, I mayn't be an angel, but I'm not a tipsy costermonger!"

"Well, when she came to me," she resumed, recognising that she was pitching her note in too tragic a key for a brute so dull, "I saw the case was one for the lawyers. In your wife's present state of mind it would be useless to see her. It can only lead to a painful scene, so I beg you will not insist on an interview. When Colonel Madryn returns she will of course go to him. Meanwhile, it seems to me quite useless for us to argue about a subject on which we hold such widely different views. What you have just said has made it clear to me that you are perfectly incapable of understanding the feelings of an honourable woman, both in her relations with the man she has married and with her friends. If you did understand them you would at once help your wife to free herself from ties which your conduct has made intolerable."

"It's been 'six of one and half a dozen of the other,' Mrs. Stewart, 'pon my word it has! Talking of feeling and all that sort of thing, you forget a

man has feelings too. I want my wife to give me another chance. After all, marriage must be a give-and-take game. She oughtn't to have married me—there was another fellow to choose if she wasn't sure—if she was not prepared for little accidents of this kind. However, perhaps you'll ask her to think it over, and to do nothing rash—at all events not before seeing her father.”

He rose from his chair to go, proud of having kept his temper and persuaded that he had conducted himself with complete dignity.

“I will tell your wife all you have said, Mr. Drayton,” replied Mrs. Stewart.

But, as she rose, he saw, for the first time, vindictiveness gleaming in her eyes. It prompted his last words.

“There is only one thing more to be said, Mrs. Stewart. I mean so far as you and your friends are concerned. A fight in a Divorce Court shows up all manner of people and things. It happens that Mrs. Drayton has long been accustomed to make appointments at the club, of which you are a shining light, with a man who made love to her before she married me. I tell you this because I detest a scandal, and because, if the worst comes, the names of all manner of charming and, of course, perfectly innocent people, will be dragged in.”

“Your warning and advice are a credit to your character, Mr. Drayton,” she replied.

Then she rang the bell. Drayton walked slowly

out of the room, his defiant jauntiness unruffled. She heard the door close on him and went up to the drawing-room where her friend was waiting.

"He is," she exclaimed, "a most dreadful man, and if he had married me I fully believe I should have poisoned him. He treats his own odious conduct as though it were an agreeable incident in the life of a 'gallant sportsman.'"

"That is just how I expected him to treat it," said his wife.

"Men have no more morals than monkeys!" exclaimed Mrs. Stewart.

"Don't talk of morals, Sybil, please. Tell me what he said."

Then Mrs. Stewart gave a vindictive version of the interview, and her guest's heart sank as the prospects of escape diminished.



## CHAPTER XXI

A MORAL situation shapes itself as much from the pressure without as by the instincts within. Among artificial and wealthy communities even aversion does not obtain fair play. It is not permitted to exact greater punishment than is convenient to the maintenance of established order. This especially holds good in the relations of husband and wife. Here three interests at least are concerned—the man's, the wife's, the family's, without reckoning the claims of the environing society. The confusion produced by conjugal misconduct does not snap the formal bond when social reasons exist for maintaining the semblance of domestic harmony. Men in business may have partners whom they cordially hate, but mutual dislike does not cancel their agreement when the partnership is a profitable one. The same holds good in the contracts between the sexes solemnised in the Church, which often present a smooth surface to the eyes of the onlooker when there is nothing but disunion beneath. Men and women are willing to live a Punch and Judy life for the sake of an entailed estate, or of children in need of a parental example of domestic stability.

Constance Drayton had made up her mind to rush for freedom through the gap her husband's misconduct afforded.

It was certainly a melancholy and humiliating position, and one bereft of all dignity ; and there was no bold knight to rescue her, on the crupper of a gallant steed, from vile durance ; no young Lochinvar to gallop her off to regions beyond the conventions coercing her. And would she have galloped with him ? She was not sure, but even Philip Gordon seemed selfish because helpless to aid her. The day after leaving her husband she learnt that he was on the point of starting for Australia "on business."

Had the young man been able to look into her thoughts the catastrophe might have been swift, final, and socially irremediable. But Philip Gordon's insight into her hopes and fears was limited.

The quarrel between Mrs. Drayton and her husband must take its course ; it seemed especially beyond the influence of the man who loved her in secret. The subject, unless she desired it, could not be discussed between them.

Six months later, when he returned from Australia where he was bound in order to protect the interests of a Mining Syndicate jeopardised in some local tribunal, the threatened "Drayton case" would have found a settlement.

When Philip suddenly told his unsuspecting father of his intention, the shock of the old man's dis-

appointment set him complaining almost pathetically. The confusion which he had thrown into the Madryn camp he was now preparing to enjoy ; but here was his son ("who needn't do a stroke of work if he didn't like!") running off on some lawyer's errand to the other side of the world !

"You ain't goin' because we had a tiff, Phil, are you?" he asked.

"No; because the offer is a flattering one, because Locksley advised the Syndicate to select me, and because I shall be well paid."

"What's the fee?" asked Mortimer.

His son mentioned it.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed, impressed. He knew the value of money. This was "not a chance to be sneezed at!"

He tried another way, however, as a test.

"But how about your friend, Mrs. Drayton, Phil? You know she's left her husband and gone back to her father. Mayn't she want you to stand by her in her trouble?"

But Philip had now a key for reading his father.

"Only the courts can help Mrs. Drayton," Philip answered.

"But, you see, Drayton don't want to be chucked! He means to square it, Phil! The whole Square knows! He's tryin' to get old Madryn on his side, an' bluffin' an' lyin' a treat!"

"It is a matter the Square can know nothing about, sir," said Philip indignantly.

"You needn't snap me up so, if it is!" retorted the old man, with an illused air.

"I didn't mean to speak abruptly, sir; but the affair is one which concerns Colonel Madryn and his daughter alone. If I could help them, do you think I would have accepted the Syndicate's offer?"

"Don't know what you'd do," grumbled the old man. There was something in his son's attitude which he could not fathom. Here was a good chance for the rejected lover to recoup himself! He expected all conduct to be formed in the same callous mould as his own. Hence arose his miscalculations.

"If it's money you want, Phil," resumed Mortimer reproachfully, "you know where to come!"

"It isn't money, sir, although it might be."

The old man took the hint. He ought to have remembered Phil wasn't the right sort of chap to threaten. He had expected him to play some sort of picturesquely selfish part,—in fact to help him "have it out of those d——d Madryns' pride!"—but here was the business running in quite different grooves.

"So you must go, then, Phil?" said Mortimer.

"It's the best chance I've ever had. But of course if you wish me to stop——"

"No," interrupted his father, not very firmly but with his mind's eye fixed on the big fee, "no, I wouldn't go so far as that."

"Very good, then," answered Philip, "I shall start next Friday."

And so he did, and had steamed through the

Straits, and was coasting the sunbaked shores of Spain when Constance Drayton, who hoped that he was still in London, wrote, in her doubt, asking for advice.

Meanwhile, Mortimer Gordon was enjoying—less than he expected—the mischief that he had encouraged. It was not moving fast enough, and he dreaded having needlessly offended his son. There had been “a change in the boy’s manner he didn’t like”; and although he bragged of the Australian trip, and told his friends that “Phil was the only chap in London, except Locksley, Q.C., M.P., the Syndicate thought fit for the job,” he felt as a man who has been baulked of half his anticipated reward.

“If I told the chap I’d cut him off with a penny,” reflected the aggrieved old man, “why he’d tell me to go and be blowed.”

And the knowledge that his son was capable of “getting along without his help,” previously flattering to the parental pride, now, by some odd process of reaction, galled it.

Determined—as is due to a man worth £250,000—to have his own way, it now seemed that “the thing wasn’t panning out properly.” He was conscious of a sense of injustice in the air.

“Confound the Madryn lot,” he thought savagely, “they’re more trouble than they’re worth.”

Meanwhile, Drayton’s determination not “to let his wife ‘chuck him’” was bearing fruit of some indifferant sort. On leaving the Stewarts’ house, after

his wife's refusal to see him, he had made a dash to capture her father before she could "get at him"; and sent the colonel a telegram which brought him up to town by the train which his son-in-law had suggested. They met on the platform at Paddington Station.

The colonel, his hands behind his stiff back, looked severely at his son-in-law, greatly perturbed, yet uncertain how to act. His daughter's letter simply told him that she found it impossible to continue living under the same roof as her husband; contrasting this unexplained statement with the appeal from her husband, urging him to stop a groundless scandal before it was too late, he was naturally prepared to believe that both of them had been behaving like fools.

"It was only a few weeks ago, sir," he said to Drayton, in his court-martial voice, "that I spoke to you on this very business. Why didn't you tell me what was going on then?"

"Because I couldn't foresee some scoundrel would write a lying anonymous letter," replied Drayton, "and that my wife would believe it."

Colonel Madryn had a magnificent contempt for anonymous letters.

"Of what does my daughter complain, sir?" he asked.

The authoratative voice annoyed Drayton, but he submitted to it and gave the colonel his version of the story as they drove to Rutland Square.

He had had before his marriage, he admitted, relations with a lady who had adopted the name of Mrs. Ravenswood. To prevent trouble, to satisfy her claims, and to gratify a gentlemanly desire to be generous, he had continued to make her an allowance after his marriage. In yielding to this amiable weakness he had been a bit of a fool, no doubt, but, after all, she came of a respectable stock, was quite a 'decent sort,' and had made sacrifices which good-natured fellows are bound in honour not to overlook."

Here Drayton paused, and looked at his father-in-law to note the effect.

"It is a devilish ugly, low story!" exclaimed the colonel; "but go on. I've heard plenty like it."

"Well, this one's ancient history now," Drayton answered, getting to the root of his lie.

"Where's the woman?" snapped the colonel.

"What! Mrs. Ravenswood? Goodness knows! In America, I fancy."

Then, after a pause, thickened with sulkiness on Drayton's part, the latter got on with his excuses. As the colonel knew, neither of them had a sweet temper. When they jarred he, wisely in his opinion, made himself scarce. But, in consequence of the letter, his wife was now attributing recent absences to an influence which had long ago ceased to exist. Such conduct he now claimed to be ridiculous. She refused to see him or to hear any explanation, and was now threatening him with a suit for a judicial

separation, or something of the sort. For such proceedings there were no grounds, and he should fight it. He had been indiscreet, perhaps, but nothing more. Legal proceedings could only result in a deplorable scandal. He was willing to make atonement for his conduct to his wife,—to ask her pardon, to treat her with every consideration,—but, for the sake of the boy and their joint families, he must entreat the colonel to induce his daughter to act as a reasonable woman.

The colonel had listened with a melancholy countenance. He was not a man who asked great things of the world, or who expected much from the husband of his daughter ; but Drayton's unpleasant story, unredeemed by a single flash of intelligence, or of higher feeling, made him feel morally sick.

"I wish to God, sir!" he exclaimed, "my daughter had never married you."

"I'm almost tempted to wish the same," replied Drayton ; "but, having married me, I'm sure, as a man of the world, you'll see the wisdom of advising her to make the best of me. You've no idea how little I ask of her. If we haven't pulled together it isn't all my fault."

The colonel heard this retort in silence ; the cab stopped before his house, and they got out.

"I won't ask you to come in now, Drayton," the colonel said. "My daughter will be here in a moment. I will hear what she has to say, and then, if I honestly feel I can, will advise her to see you."



Meanwhile, we are both in the mood to say unpleasant things. You shall hear from me this evening."

"All right," said Drayton. "I'm anxious to make things square. There's only one thing I'll say. My wife's been staying at the Stewarts'. Mrs. Stewart hates me. She's been doing her best to set Connie against me."

The colonel nodded his head coldly, and said :

"I note what you say."

Then he let himself in with his latch-key, and Drayton, in a savage temper, feeling himself snubbed, walked across the Square, passing the Stewarts' brougham opposite the Gordons' house. In it sat his wife who made a point of not seeing him. Old Mortimer, standing in the bay-window of his dining-room, on scouting duty, as it were, saw with glee this striking proof of the success of his simple manœuvre.

## CHAPTER XXII

THERE are no more melancholy disputes than those which spring from the baulked happiness of marriage. Nature apparently intended such sex battles to be fought out solely by the couple concerned ; but civilisation has stepped in with its softening artifices, and in genteel society at least the lawyers now monopolise the part once played by bow-string, dagger, or poisoned cup. Othello drops his bolster and hurries off to consult Sir George Arran, and collect evidence for counter accusations, as Drayton did after leaving his father-in-law, on a hostile doorstep.

“ I’ll see them somewhere before they shall bully me ! ” growled the unrepentant sinner.

And so he told his story, and procured a champion.

Two days later the formidable Sir George saw Mr. Price, the old-fashioned family solicitor, who represented the Madryns and the conventionalities.

The result of this was an interview between the two men, in which Sir George’s weight told and Mr. Price discovered and communicated to Colonel Madryn a dozen excellent reasons for making the best of the misunderstanding.

Colonel Madryn’s views on the relations of married

people—especially in his own family—were not original. He considered it to be the duty of a wife—even at the sacrifice of her moral comfort—to tolerate her husband and to avoid a public scandal. The bare idea of his daughter appearing in the Divorce Court filled him with dismay, and in spite of her resolute opposition, he agreed with Mr. Price that Drayton's offences must be condoned.

"Just think of the scandal!" the cry which buzzed in the ears of the harassed lady, drove her to the fruitless appeal to Philip Gordon, already on board the "P. & O." steamer on his way to Australia. Among the subjects which a young woman cannot discuss with her father as naked facts are her relations with her husband. A common horror of the thing kept the Madryns from a complete investigation of the daughter's grievances. These were accepted by the father as existing but unrealised in their actual grossness, partly because the young woman was unable to speak of them openly, partly because her father wished to believe the case to be no worse than his son-in-law represented it.

That the fellow had behaved abominably, the colonel did not—at least to himself—attempt to deny. But he remembered that such bad bargains were among the inevitable risks of matrimony, from which he did not expect even his own family to be exempt. He knew a little of the secret history of a number of marriages. Few of these had been examples of ideal dignity. There was always something—

quarrels about settlements, disputes aggravated by the usual domestic levity, or, at best, silly squabbles magnified into serious wrongs and made vindictive from the sheer unfitness of couples to live together.

Moreover, he remembered misunderstandings with his late wife, a lady of an imperious temper, some of whose resolute character his daughter had inherited.

Finding for his moral comfort a policy necessary, which should enable his conscience to believe that he was dealing with the quarrel as a just father, anxious solely for his daughter's happiness and his grandson's future welfare, he decided to throw in his influence with that of Mr. Price, whom the audacious and strong-willed Sir George Arran swayed. It chanced, too, to be one of those moments when the frivolous part of society is playing at being serious. Levity was no longer "good form." When, therefore, Lady Angmering and Lady Belchester discovered that, if their friend sought relief in the Law Courts, the club they had founded would be represented to the jury as a place where married ladies of "a certain set" gave interviews to gentlemen whom they were afraid to receive in their own homes, they began to be anxious.

Unpleasant things concerning "The Sisters'" had already been whispered in the papers.

Mrs. Stewart and her two sisters met and discussed the danger.

"Sir George Arran," said Lady Belchester,—her husband's family had had dealings with Sir George,—

"declares Mr. Drayton has a strong case, and that—just think of it!—it will compromise the club!"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Mrs. Stewart.

"How?" asked Lady Angmering.

"He will declare he forbade his wife to join it—he is a man with no scruples!—on the grounds that it's quite a disreputable place. Then he'll show that she not only became a member, but insisted on having men to see her there whom he wouldn't receive in his own house! Oh! he is making up a very pretty story, I assure you! In fact, if Connie Drayton persists in her suit, her wretched 'Bluebeard' is determined 'to show us up all round,' as he calls it."

"Let him!" said Mrs. Stewart. "The club can stand it."

"Don't be silly, Sybil," replied Lady Belchester. "We have no right to put it to the strain, especially just now when every one wants to appear simple and good. Now, Sybil, you have a lot of influence over Connie. Can't you induce her to come to terms—the man has had his lesson? Surely people in their position can live in the same house without seeing one another more than once a month! Look at the Chesters! they haven't exchanged a word for two years. Yet there is no scandal about them! Even when they are in the same room each allows the other a fair share of it—at the further end, of course. Then there are Lady Gertrude and her husband, who never meet except at their own dinner-parties. There are a dozen excellent examples for

Connie to follow. He's ready to sign things, they say. They might agree to have half the house in Sloane Square each; and when they're at his big place in the country they might live in separate wings without the least risk of friction. It is quite unreasonable of her to want to get rid of him so desperately! Much as I dislike the man, I must say his desire to avoid scandal is creditable. I agree with the Pope: divorce is un-Christian! Real divorce is in the heart—in the affections—where the Draytons have divorced each other for ever so long. For the sake of the example, which all of us owe to the middle classes, a scandal so closely associated with our own set must be avoided."

And she only stopped because she was out of breath.

"My dear," exclaimed Sybil Stewart, "I never heard you say so many obvious things before! You have left nothing to the imagination."

"I agree with every word she has said," exclaimed Lady Angmering. "Remember, Sybil, we have more to lose than you."

"Oh, we can't all marry peers," retorted Mrs. Stewart. "Even if Mr. Drayton was one, he couldn't be more anxious to preserve his character."

When they were alone, Lady Angmering told Lady Belchester that Sybil was "almost vulgar"; and Lady Belchester replied that it was a pity that Sybil did not remember, in her desire to persecute this "unfortunate man," that she once wanted to marry him herself.

But the pressure brought to bear on Constance Drayton by relations, friends, expediency, circumstance, gradually produced the natural effect. The lawyer said there was no escape, her father agreed; even Sybil Stewart counselled a policy of half-surrender. If Drayton defended the case there was small chance that the court would grant a decree. Was not a practical separation, even if it were necessary to pretend to live together for a few months in the year, better than matrimonial stalemate—purchasable only at the cost of a big, ugly scandal?

In this life most grievances have to be settled on the profit-and-loss basis. Even morals are regulated in their scope by the same practical spirit—the spirit which is to mould both mind and matter throughout future generations, and out of which modern patriots have decided that the British Empire must be reconstructed. There is a price for everything—if only the other dealer can be forced to accept it!

But for many weeks Constance Drayton remained obdurate; and when, at the end of July, she went to Homburg with Colonel Madryn, her aunt, and little Frankie, Mr. Price and Sir George Arran were still negotiating on behalf of herself and Drayton without having reached an understanding.

Meanwhile, Mortimer Gordon had been looking on in an evil temper. The explosion which he had expected had ended in smoke.

"They were," he said contemptuously, "a nice lot, without pluck enough to fight."

So far as he could see, the gossip of the Square had no more effect on the Madryn pride than wind and weather on a lighthouse. Moreover, there was no doubt of it—he missed his son, the one vital and wholesome link connecting him with the honest world. In some dim sort of way, under his son's shadow, he felt himself half a gentleman, a faith which gave him a standard of behaviour and had taught him to speak imperfectly a language still strange to his lips. Except in the sporting papers and the Stock Markets he had now no interests. The time began to hang heavily upon him; the mantle of respectability in his solitude galled his shoulders. He took it off in search of diversion, and sat in shirt-sleeves. Thus his feet wandered back naturally enough to well-remembered paths. He began to drink more whiskey than was good for him, to look for amusement among men of his own class, adventurers of the turf and the racing stable, still dabbling in the mud out of which luck and resolution had lifted him. In this dirty little world he always found flatterers and toadies. There, at least, he was some one; in the other world, without his son, he was blundering outside his allotted orbit. Its inhabitants seemed hypocrites, pigs, or jackanapes—there was "ne'er a man like his Phil!"

And what had Phil done? Why gone away and left his old dad to fend for himself!



When he drank too much, now—every day—he grew almost sentimental, a mood, however, rapidly leading him into the confines of ferocity.

One evening, after dining with his boon companions at a tavern off Fleet Street, he returned home imperfectly sober, and swore at Mrs. Wetherley-Scott.

What the devil did she mean by letting his butler go out? The butler was needed to serve his master, and the friends whom he had brought home, with whatever drinks they might fancy. But he had taken the cellar key, omitting to leave out a supply. In his irritation he informed the poor lady that she was a stupid old fool, who ought to know better! Her solitary pillow was wet with the tears of her wrath; and on the next morning she sought refuge with her sister, leaving a brief letter, in which she declined, "after what had happened," to attend longer to Mr. Gordon's domestic interests.

Mortimer, who did not clearly remember what he had said, resigned himself without regret to the situation. The woman who couldn't put up with a little "lip" on occasions wasn't wanted in his house. She might go and be hanged for all he cared! In his scrawled reply, he said that she might "send in her bill"; but refrained from the apology which all Mrs. Scott's acquaintances deemed necessary to her dignity. Here ended her rule.

From this point old Gordon began a rapid descent into the disreputable lowlands, from whence, with

his son's aid, he had risen. Boon companions in loud clothes were now constantly on his doorstep, or swaggering with big cigars in their mouths at his bow-windows. That part of Mortimer's life which his son's influence had kept out of its visible side now invaded it unchecked.

The Square was shocked.

Mr. Cone said, "The old fellow has kicked over the traces, because the young fellow's away." The scandal almost rivalled in interest that which "the unhappy quarrels of the Draytons" had set in motion round the sombre, and now closed house of Colonel Madryn.

When the Square was contemplating its usual summer exodus, it was reported that old Gordon had left "for the seaside." It was not known where he went, but he was heard of at various big hotels—popular with bookmakers, music-hall proprietors, and gentlemen with pronounced tastes for what is sometimes called "life."

In the autumn, however, he returned accompanied by a handsome fair-haired woman of forty, who claimed the name of Mrs. Fortescue, frequently drank champagne for breakfast, and addressed him as Morty.

The Square was shocked.

"He'll end in marrying that awful woman," it said.

But Mr. Cone knew better.

"Old Mortimer isn't a fool," said he. "Besides,

there's a Mr. Fortescue somewhere. When last heard of he was a clown in a travelling circus."

This was worse and worse.

"Some one ought to exposulate with him," said the Square; and Mrs. Parkington, who was most grieved of all, appealed to the Vicar of St. Peter's, where Mortimer no longer worshipped. But the reverend gentleman knew his man. Old Gordon's name was still on the list of his charities, and he did not wish it taken off. He declined to interfere.

"Rather," said the vicar, "let us hope for the best and wait until the young man returns from Australia."

## CHAPTER XXIII

GRADUALLY, as the astute Sir George Arran had foreseen, the adjustment of the dispute between the Draytons came about, on terms which suggested forgiveness on the part of the wife, repentance and the promise of amendment on that of the husband.

Seen a long way off the apparent reconciliation resembled the popular ending to a lovers' quarrel, with which it had nothing in common.

Women with a strong sense of justice, and whose ideals marriage has destroyed, have small power of forgiveness.

Drayton's most solid quality was dull obstinacy. The very evident desire of his wife to be free from him increased his determination not to let her escape. It also excited a deep desire to "pay her out." The only way to do this visible to him—and in his vindictiveness he was unoriginal—was to compel her at least to pretend to be his wife.

When, in their second interview, she made him understand on what footing she was prepared to be with him, he supposed that in that case he would be allowed "full liberty."

"So long as you don't drag anything disgraceful

about our ears," said she, "I really hardly care what you do."

The laws and conventions regulating dissolution of marriage, now that she had vainly beaten her wings against them, appeared to her malicious barriers raised by the pride of man for the humiliation of women.

The bitter experiences of the last six months were hardening her heart. "If it were not for little Frankie!" The thought led into the slippery places where the weak seek comfort, but whither she refused to follow it.

Everybody, with two exceptions, said "The Draytons have made up their row like sensible people," and in a week had almost forgotten that "they didn't get on."

One exception was Sybil Stewart, who had longed for poetic justice, only the hero had not been forthcoming. The other was Mortimer Gordon, who positively believed that the reconciliation shocked his morals.

"Why, Peter," he said to Davies, "if a bloke in Whitechapel had behaved to his girl as that chap's treated his wife, she'd 'a' pulled the house down!"

"'Property! property! property!'" grinned Mr. Davies, with distant but unconscious memories of Tennyson.

"God help the British aristocracy, then!" exclaimed Mortimer.

"Never you mind the British aristocracy, Mortimer," said Davies, "just you look at home."

"Why should I do that?" growled Mortimer, suspecting an adverse criticism on his domestic affairs. "I'm just as good as you when it comes to that."

"Better, Mortimer, better; only don't be so huffy. It don't look well."

Mr. and Mrs. Davies were dining with Mr. Gordon and Mrs. Fortescue in Rutland Square; the ladies had left them to their wine and cigars. Outside the fog was beginning to coil round the gas-lamps; in the drawing-room Mrs. Fortescue could be heard singing, to her own imperfect accompaniment, in a voice flatterers described as rich, "Let me dream again!"

The men paused in their talk, and listened to the throaty notes.

"She *can* sing," observed Davies, by way of propitiation. "A most companionable lady, I'm sure! My missus is much taken with her."

"Voice wants trainin'," said Mortimer, still on the wrong side of his temper.

"Most voices do," assented Davies leniently.

"Let me—let me dream a—gain," zigzagged the voice, and then, to the relief of the smokers, was silent.

Davies helped himself to port, held up his glass to the light with an air of approval, observed that it was "devilish fine wine," sipped it with an air of satisfaction, and looked at his host.

"You ain't yourself, Mortimer," he said, "you're putting on flesh."

"You wouldn't have me get thinner, would yer?" replied the old fellow hastily.

"It isn't the right sort of flesh, Mortimer; and your eyes are a bit baggy. The fact is you've been going the pace, and at our age,"—Davies was ten years his junior,—“and at our age, you know, we can't stand it.”

"Speak for yourself, Davies; I'm all right," said his irritable host.

"I'm glad of that, old chap, I am, indeed, for you don't seem fit. I've been thinking it will be a good thing when Phil comes back to look after you. When he does, my boy, there'll have to be reforms!"

"I'll let Phil know who's master when he does come!" growled Mortimer.

"He's never doubted that," Davies replied.

"Then what d'yer mean by what you said?"

"You know well enough, Mortimer. You ain't playing the right sort of game. A man in your position owes something to Society."

"Society be hanged!"

"You didn't say that two years ago, Squire!"

"Well, I mean it now! What's Society done for me, I should like to know, 'xcept turn my boy against me? I played the game to please him. Now I'm goin' to play it to please m'self."

The old man emptied his glass. His eyes were bloodshot, his clean-shaved, ruddy face mottled with

purpler shades. Irritability and disappointment were fixing the blinkers on his understanding. As an old acquaintance and valuable client it was clear to Davies that he must be humoured.

"He always did drink too much," he reflected, "and it's playing the deuce with him now."

And so the lawyer did his best to soothe his difficult friend ; but it required half an hour's dexterous flattery to bring him back to something resembling good-humour.

"It isn't as though the old chap had anything to worry about," he said to Mrs. Davies as they were driving home.

"He's cantankerous, just because he has got all he wants and finds he can't trample over people," replied Mrs. Davies, who prided herself on her knowledge of men, and had enjoyed opportunities of studying several offensive specimens.

"It's a wonder how the young fellow kept him so straight," mused Davies, aloud.

"It was the old man's pride, of course," replied Mrs. Davies.

"What does Mrs. F—— think?" inquired Davies.

"Why! that he's just awful. He's liberal though, —gave her a di'mond pendant last week,—but he *does* want managing."

"There are allowances," said Davies. "One side of him has been starved, you see."

She did not know, but he thought it unnecessary to explain that it was the vindictive side.



But the lady "had no patience with such selfishness."

"He thinks of nothing but himself," she exclaimed.

And the whole way home Mrs. Davies abused her host, who had trodden on the corns of her vanity. "We ain't none of us so young as we look, Mrs. D——," Mr. Gordon had observed in a moment of ferocious playfulness, a statement of fact as accurate as it was displeasing to the lady.

Peter Davies had overheard this remark. It now caused him to doubt the impartiality of his companion, even when she insisted for the third time that "Gordon was an ill-behaved, horrid, rude old man."

"The rummest thing about him," said Mr. Davies, a far keener observer, "isn't his manners, but his morals. He applies 'em to every case but his own!"

Still there were causes for Mortimer Gordon's discontent which even Davies did not guess. He was learning late in life, when the experience is the most painful that the world was something more than a football to be kicked into whatever paltry goal he might choose. He was conscious that something was kicking back—something invisible, nameless, mysterious. Thirty years earlier he had seen the supremest human happiness hidden behind "plenty of money." He was now worth—he sometimes imparted the information to his friends as though it were an unconsidered trifle—"a matter of a quarter of a million"; but, although the pride of

possession enabled him to despise those who had less, without compelling him to admire men who owned more, he had now learnt that even money is not magic. It had not subdued the Madryn pride, nor brought with it wings to fly into new worlds. After sixty the material joys have lost most of their zest. The costliest wines, the choicest cigars, the most ostentatious house furniture merely become empty symbols of swollen vanity after the several appetites necessary for their enjoyment are worn out. Whenever Mortimer now "went on the spree,"—his euphemism for an organised debauch,—headache, lassitude, disappointment, and melancholy gathered round his bed in the morning. The iron constitution, which had obeyed its master like a long-suffering and faithful servant, was at last beginning to complain. In an old age undeserving of honour, happiness is too delicate a flower to take root. Behind Mortimer there stretched out a long life of duties neglected, of gentle things despised and trampled on, of contempt for men and women, less brutal strugglers in the fell arena than himself. An atrophied conscience no longer pricked him or even questioned his claims to the manly virtues: yet how was the world repaying him? It wanted his money, but whilst it tolerated him for that, he saw plainly enough that it shrank from himself unadorned.

The son's departure for Australia opened the old man's eyes. The court that Rutland Square had paid him was for the boy. The women wanted him

for their daughters, but now that Mrs. Wetherley-Scott had been sworn out of the house, and the dubious Mrs. Fortescue, with her rouge, her golden hair, and her champagne for breakfast, installed in her place, even Mrs. Parkington with her bouquet of daughters,—she had once impressed “the bouquet on the cunning old man who laughed at her “for an old fool,”—even this tolerant lady now pretended not to see him when they met. Yet she had dined at his house and flattered him on his youthful appearance. But the world into which, over his son's shoulders, he had managed to peep, found that it had had more than enough of him after he began to cut his conduct out of the cloth of his own course desires.

And so, when well beyond the confines of sobriety and his valet hinted what was said in the Square, Mortimer felt something of Timon's wrath against human selfishness.

Of the burly adventurers of his youth, few like himself had prospered; but some had kept their heads out of the grave and their dresscoats out of the pawnshop. In this faithful band, and among the sporting, drinking, roystering youths who followed it, he always found companions willing to feast with him and flatter him. And these he tolerated and patronised so long as they did not want to borrow money. Their coarse laughter startled the respectable serenity of the Square; and when a guest, found drunk on his doorstep, was fined for the disdemeanour

and admonished from the Bench, the neighbours asked whether something couldn't be done!

At last, early in February, Philip Gordon arrived home. Letters from Peter Davies and one from Mrs. Wetherley-Scott had prepared him for changes; but for nothing resembling the situation which sprung out on him like a savage from an ambush.

It was a frosty afternoon. The turf of the square was powdered with snow, the sun sinking behind a wintry glow of drifting smoke haze; the east wind blew keenly.

Philip's cab stopped before his father's door, Green, the valet, who had been with old Mortimer more than twenty years, opened it. Engaged as a lad to clean boots, in days when his employer was first clutching the flying coat-tails of prosperous respectability, Green knew all the secrets of the family, and acted as the old man's intelligence department. When Mr. Gordon inquired, as he often did, "What do they say in the Square, Green?" Green was usually able to give a fairly accurate epitome of its opinion. "His place," was one abounding, if not in noble examples, at least in "racing tips," in exchange for which, although of uncertain value, neighbouring lacqueys willingly gave their gossip. Green was acquainted with Colonel Madryn's man, with Mrs. Parkington's maid, and with members of the domestic staff of other households. By such simple means, and at the level of the area, the secrets of one family may be conveyed

to another. Now old Gordon was as inquisitive as an ancient monkey, for ever "wondering what the old women were thinking"; and Green's information frequently enabled him to have an idea. He knew, for instance, that after his "misunderstanding" with Mrs. Scott,—all Mortimer's quarrels were misunderstandings entirely on the other side!—that she had called on Mrs. Parkington and "run him down for all she was worth." He knew what the Square said, when Bill Heath was fined for being drunk, and why the vicar, though urged to expostulate by several of the most virtuous ladies, rejected their counsel. "It's a treat to hear the old boy swear!" said Green, in private life, among his own friends; and so, "to get a rise out" of his patron, he was assiduous in collecting scandal of a suitably exasperating character.

Mortimer tested the accuracy of the valet's gossip by that reaching him by less subterranean methods; Green's reliability bore the strain, and so he was encouraged to become the old man's mischievous chamberlain.

Philip arrived two days sooner than was expected. From the drawing-room came the sounds of a lady's voice worrying a high note. It was Mrs. Fortescue at her singing lesson. She had heard that Mr. Gordon considered her voice untrained. The illustrious Signor Bresci had been called in to cultivate that powerful organ at Mortimer's expense. The expensive voice seemed strangely out of place in the

house which Philip regarded as his home. Green, superintending the reception of the luggage, noted the effect of it, and apologised for that as well as for the absence of his master.

"Didn't expect you till Friday, you see, sir, or I'm sure Mrs. Fortescue would have put off her lesson."

But the modulated screams, breaking the silence of the big house, followed the homecomer to his room like the death song of the order and calm which he had left there under Mrs. Scott's sway.

Philip Gordon's commission had been skilfully executed; the generous cheque, which had been placed to the credit of his banking account, the first signal result of his own costly education, would never have been earned if Mrs. Drayton had written four days earlier.

In the letter replying to her appeal, posted at Colombo where it had reached him, he had said what he now regretted. To make a woman understand that you love her and always have loved her, to return and find her prosaically reunited with the husband she despises; to suspect that she looked to you to rescue her from the humiliating toils, and to see no escape out of a confusion created by feebleness and selfishness, is to renounce all claims to be a hero and a man of action. To such fatuity Mrs. Fortescue singing seemed the proper accompaniment.

Before leaving England, Mrs. Stewart had said,

"Can't you see you are the only man who can help her!"

But he could not see. Whilst his heart was longing to make big sacrifices his head had led him out of the way.

"She would get free, he hoped; and then——" But the situation had resolved itself into one in which there could be no "then" for him and the woman he wanted.

"A pretty sort of lover!" he thought.

But the voice in the dining-room was sentimentalising through a ballad to which his own melancholy thoughts swayed in time like empty garments on a clothes' peg, clean but ridiculous.

To escape it he went to the morocco study where a big portrait of Mrs. Fortescue (in evening-dress and the new pendant) occupied the place of honour. It was true that she had placed it there herself; but Philip did not know this. The omen struck him as sinister. Here he awaited the shortly expected return of his father.

Some of the devil in the old man had evidently come to the top. The son saw that he no longer thought it worth while to worship in the secret places.

And as he sat musing in his father's chair the reproachful voices, which upbraid loudest when their counsel is too late, began to vex him.

"You are," they said, "like a Hamlet, trained in a Sunday-school, a feeble waverer with no purpose. If you had stayed in England and helped her like

a man, audacity might have led to happiness. You hoped, as the weak do, to find the remedy in the course of events. You helped to drive her to a surrender. You saw the signal of distress which she raised, yet never dared attempt to rescue her! Such a prize would have stirred a man with the soul of a fish! There must be something of the prig in your blood, servant of conventionality that you are!"

Thus the voices scoffed and jeered.

Whilst he sat dismally in the red armchair before the dancing fire, under the opulent charms of the presiding photograph, suddenly the original of it rushed into the room to welcome him.

"Oh, Mr. Philip!" exclaimed Mrs. Fortescue, "we didn't expect you. But what a welcome home! Me at me music, and your father out! I'm so sorry! but so pleased to see you, and you're just like your portraits! D'you know, I seem to know you quite well?"

She shook him by the hand with the complacency of the woman who feels herself "one of the family"; whilst the young man, unconscious of the protecting shadow of Mr. Fortescue, thought "this is my future mother-in-law!"

After a voluble welcome, Mrs. Fortescue stirred the fire into a brighter blaze and imagined, with vague geographical instincts, that it must be much warmer where he had come from!

"How is my father?" asked the troubled youth.

"Not very well, Mr. Phil—you won't mind me



calling you Phil, will you? Morty—I mean your father—always does, and I’ve got in the way of it myself. You see he isn’t careful. As poor Mr. Neeve says,—you’ll remember Mr. Neeve, he’s sporting correspondent of ‘The Real Winner,’—who’s ever so much worse but ever so much younger,—‘Morty will go on the bust,’ he says.”

Philip received Mr. Neeve’s red nose with resignation as an appropriate feature in the new picture. In his time Mrs. Wetherley-Scott’s dignity had kept it out of the house. Now its victory seemed natural.

“I hope my father is not very exacting?” said the young man.

“Oh no, but then, of course, I make the best of ’im. The last lady who looked after his house was ever so much too strait-laced. When Morty—your father, I mean—said, ‘Look here, Mrs. Fortescue, will you come and look after a lonely old chap?’ I made up my mind that it should be a real home for him. Now, my idea of a real home, Mr. Phil, is a place where a man can get all he wants as free and easy as though it was a restaurong or a club; and, although yer father’s temper isn’t of the sweetest, I think even he sees how much we all want to make ’im an’ his friends comfor’ble. And, talking of being comfor’ble, Mr. Phil, would you like a whiskey and seltzer or a pint o’ fizzy wine, it’s all handy, you know, an’ you’ve had a long journey?”

Whilst Philip was parrying these florid hospitalities,

Mortimer Gordon came into the room with a "What, Phil! we didn't expect you till Friday!"

"I was telling Mr. Phil how sorry you'd be," said Mrs. Fortescue.

"All right, Poll, you go and sing yerself something in the drawin'-room. Phil an' me'll come up and listen after we've had our chat out."

"Isn't that like him?" exclaimed the unabashed lady; "tells you straight what he wants! No mincing matters with him! No wonder you didn't get on with Mrs. Scott, Morty; but there, don't scowl, I'm off. Tat-ta till dinner. I'll take care you shall have a nice slice off the fatted calf, Mr. Phil."

And as she bustled off, leaving an odour of violet scent behind her, she suggested to the young man a big white heifer trotting from a safe stall.

"Quite a good-natured woman that, Phil, but too spirited at times," said Mortimer, when she was gone.

"She seems—eh—amiable," said Philip, painfully conscious of the lack of approving warmth in his voice.

"I didn't expect you'd like—her," said his father. "She ain't class enough for you. Too rough and ready, too much 'slap-you-on-the-back' style, but she's a good 'un to look at, and cheerful about the house. You can guess I wanted cheering all these months. Let me see, how long you have been away?"

Philip told him, and gave him a short account of his successful conduct of the case.

Mortimer was interested and pleased. Here was

something to gratify his sense of altruistic pride! "The job was a big one!" His indirect association with it gratified a vanity on whose altar no dignified tribute had smoked since his son's departure.

On his side the young man was pained to see the physical, and to suspect the moral deterioration in his father. The ruddy glow on his face was not that of health; the vigour he remembered was visibly undermined. He had become an old man in something else than years.

"I'm sorry not to see you looking better," he said gently. "I hope you haven't been worried."

"What should I be worried about?" growled his father, who resented all references to a physical change of which he was not 'unconscious. "I ain't old Madryn, with a daughter pulled out o' the Divorce Courts. I haven't sent my daughter back to live with a man with no more morals than a ferret. My fam'ly ain't disgraced, at all events! But o' course you don't know what's been goin' on. 'Twas a blessed scandal in this very classy Square, I can tell you, Phil! The girl said she wouldn't go back. Madryn said she must. People, like your friends Lady Belchester, Lady Angmering, and that lot, backed him up for all they were worth—they funked it because that beast Drayton said he'd be hanged if he didn't show up the whole blooming lot! Even your name was mentioned, Phil. They said you'd got out of it at the nick o' time. Sir George Arran—and that's a chap who thoroughly understands human

nature!—frightened the whole lot so much that the poor gal, who just hates the chap, ended in caving in; and there they are, man an' wife again, goin' about everywhere as pleased with 'emselves as though the ten commandments had never been writ. But it isn't what I call morals, Phil. Then, you see, I picked up mine in a diff'rent school; an' though not ashamed o' my name or fam'ly, I don't 'xactly belong to the British aristocracy, like old Madryn."

And as the old man flourished his clumsy irony the young man's heart sank.

"Colonel Madryn and his daughter acted, I believe, from the highest motive," he replied, abashed by the feebleness of his answer and conscious of having uttered the platitude before.

"'Course they did!" grinned Mortimer. "People o' that class always do!"

But the old man continued to relieve his spleen, by abusing the Madryns and deploring the sins of the society in which they lived, until Philip, unable to bear it longer, exclaimed:

"For heaven's sake, sir, remember what the lady was and still is to me, and do try to curse them all in silence if you feel you must!"

And this was the point at which the cunning old fellow was aiming.

"Gawd bless me soul, Phil!" he answered, "I forgot, o' course she is. But there's just a little hint I'd like to give you, in case you want to have 'a look in' at that *manège*,"—he had picked up the word

from Mrs. Fortescue, but probably meant *ménage*,—"if you should—I say—don't look like that man, I don't mean what's in your mind—well, if you should, that's all, you can get your fun pretty cheap. After what's happened that lot'll square anything ; besides, it's put itself out o' court."

The young man rose from his chair and looked out on the frosty Square. The lamps were just beginning to twinkle, but the faint glow still lingered before the approaching night haze.

Behind him, in the dancing glow of the fire, his father sat chuckling wickedly, the lights reflected in his small obstinate bloodshot eyes.

His hatred of the Madryns had become a sort of obsession with which it was hopeless to remonstrate or reason. What a homecoming ! The frost on the grass and trees was the measure of its warmth.

## CHAPTER XXIV

PHILIP was not unprepared for the further melancholy enlightenment which the evening brought him. Old Gordon had reached the Promised Land to discover that he had lost his appetite for the milk and honey in journeying thither. His son was more pained than astonished at the vicious moral reaction on the part of the ancient sinner to whom he owed so much. When Mortimer declared that he "had done his duty by Phil," as he sometimes did now that his self-restraint, together with his nerve was shaken, he boasted with some reason. Weary of appearing respectable, he was having that "last fling" which appears necessary to certain brutal natures before senile decay has arrested the balance of mischievous energy still outstanding from a vigorous middle age.

"Your father says," observed Mrs. Fortescue confidently, "that he's played the game for you, now he's going to play it a little for himself. I just tell you this, Mr. Phil, because it'll help you to help me manage him."

This was just before dinner, for which she was lavishly arrayed. To explain her splendour, she

informed him that they were "expecting a few friends."

"Your father mustn't be allowed to be dull; it's bad for him," she continued. "So, instead of his hunting up his friends and coming home at goodness knows what hour, I encourage him to ask them here. I dessay you'll think we're a little bit what you call Bohemian; but lor', what does that matter so long as the old gentleman's amused, Mr. Phil?"

But when he heard the names of the four or five guests expected, the young man was not reassured. He was not accustomed to dine with men who, if they did not get drunk, ceased to be sober whenever the supply of good liquor was unstinted and free.

Some of these men he had not seen since a lad, although their names were familiar. All had retained the "Jolly Dog" manners acquired in an earlier generation than his, when it was the custom of the third-rate "man-about-town" to drink with the chairman at the beery music-halls of the period, and, in expansive moments, even to join in the chorus with a lusty air of patronage.

For his father's sake Philip Gordon made himself as amiable as the exacting circumstance admitted, suffering himself to be greeted "a chip of the old block" and enduring similar indignities with resignation. Some of our most painful sacrifices none see. This one, however, was not quite lost on the old man. He knew, as he told Mrs. Fortescue, "what Phil thought of such chaps," and accepted his son's

courtesies to his guests as a becoming manifestation of filial piety.

The evening was one of those which old Gordon was accustomed to describe as "a little wet." This, being interpreted, meant that, at the end of the orgie, he found difficulty in reaching his room, whilst his guests exhibited extreme reluctance to abandon their chairs before midnight.

The problem that now faced Philip Gordon was that of restoring the reign of order in his father's household. How was it to be done? Was it even possible? How could a son tell his father that he could not tolerate his friends? A man must be a prig, a snob, or a reforming moralist to attempt such a task.

He might of course live in Chambers and leave his father full scope to indulge his own unfortunate tastes,—the plan Mrs. Fortescue encouraged,—but as a policy this seemed feeble.

But, above all, would it be possible to get rid of her? Certainly she was an awful woman; yet, as a hostess for the little band of noisy sycophants, the training acquired behind the bar seemed not unsuited. How well she understood them! She was the female of the male type. Moreover, if she, in any way, added to his father's comfort did she not rather deserve encouragement than resentment?

All appeals to his father, the son knew, were futile. No man was more satisfied with his own virtues than Mortimer Gordon. But hard drinking and free



living were beginning to tell on his constitution. How could he be induced to live sanely if not cleanly.

Philip thought of these things after the dismal spectacle of his father's ascent of the stairs—when the door had closed on the last guest, the hall clock had struck twelve, and Mrs. Fortescue's only half maternal and wholly vinous kiss had been successfully parried.

What an odd galley for a rising barrister to be imprisoned on! The ancient parable seemed to be reversed in its application.

"Until I get drunk with my father and his toadies," he reflected, "there can be no complete understanding between us!"

Followed by this depressing thought he went to bed and slept ill.

But when he came down on the following morning and learnt from Green, the valet, that his father was "not well," he was not surprised.

"What is it, Green?" he asked.

"Don't know, sir, but the gov'nor's"—the word suggested the nature of their relations—"dreadful yellow."

His son thought of jaundice.

"He never is ill, Green."

"But you see," explained the man, "the gov'nor's been goin' it a bit stronger since you've been away."

"Where is Mrs. Fortescue?" Philip asked.

"She usually breakfasts in her room, sir,—after a late night."

Philip Gordon breakfasted alone; then, going to his father, found him in a feverish doze from which the closing of the bedroom door roused him.

His coarse, mottled face was not a pleasant sight against the white pillow. His blood-streaked eyes were shot with yellow; and he complained querulously of "pains all over." Even the sight of his son at the head of his bed did not cause him surprise.

"Green told yer I wasn't the thing, I s'pose?" he said, without lifting his head.

"You must have caught a chill," said his son.

"The thing for that's a brandy and soda," said Mortimer, with an air of melancholy conviction. "After that I'll have a sleep and, if I'm in luck, a sweat."

Since no one ever disputed his wants he tried the remedy. In an hour's time he was in a high fever and Philip, who had never seen his father ill before, sent for the doctor.

The doctor pronounced the patient to be suffering from "congested liver, accompanied by considerable gastric trouble," wrote a prescription, advised the attendance of a professional nurse, and drove away, just as Mrs. Fortescue walked downstairs to apologise for her late appearance.

"Had one of my dreadful headaches, Mr. Phil," she explained, "all across the brow, you know, just as if a hammer was thumping it."

When she learnt, for the first time, that Mr. Gordon was ill and that the doctor had been, she insisted on

hurrying to his room "to see how poor old Morty was."

This errand of mercy did not meet with the success it deserved.

Mrs. Fortescue's "sickroom manner," however well-meaning, was disturbing. It provoked a rude outbreak from the patient.

"Go to the devil, can't you?" he cried, glaring at her with bloodshot, feverish eyes; "and don't come creakin' and blowin' about the room like a d——d white elephant."

Philip, who stood at the door, remembered, with a selfish sense of security, that no man, however self-indulgent, is likely to make an offer of marriage to the woman whom he welcomes as "a white elephant." The little scene enabled him to appreciate the extent and nature of the lady's influence.

"Oh, Morty! how can you say such things?" exclaimed she.

"Oh, git along!" growled the sick man, turning contemptuously from his visitor.

Philip glanced at the valet's face—from its expression he perceived that the man was accustomed to hear his master swear at his housekeeper—then he went to the rescue.

"I think we'd better leave him, Mrs. Fortescue," he said. "The doctor said he must be kept very quiet."

Outside on the landing he apologised. He was sure his father did not know what he was saying.

"If he does," replied the injured matron, "he's beastly ungrateful. After what I've done for him, too! But he can still swear a treat, which shows he isn't very bad. The first thing a man does who's really ill is to leave off cursing and swearing."

This sanguine diagnosis, however, was not justified. Mortimer Gordon was ill for many days. The nurse and the doctor held full sway over the sickroom into which the valet and Philip were alone admitted.

"Just fancy me—who's never been sick all my life—laid up by the heels like this," said the invalid, astonished that nature should deal with him as though he were an ordinary mortal, "it's what I call cru'l luck."

A fractious, unpleasant invalid, he loathed his low diet, despised his medicines, and even mocked the science of the eminent physician called in for consultation.

The redeeming feature in the old man's conduct was his behaviour towards his son.

He was in secret terror of death. In his fever and delirium a dark shape seemed moving silently in the shadowy corners behind the fire-glow, ready to pounce upon him, menacing his life. When he was out of danger, but aged, weak, and shattered, this terror increased to such an extent that, in spite of his dread of referring to so indecent a subject as his own dissolution, he once whispered meekly to his son :

"Yer don't think I'll go off the hooks this time, do yer, Phil?"

"No chance of it!" replied his son.

"Will yer swear?"

"I will give you my word of honour that you'll be up before the leaves are out in the Square.

As he spoke he pressed his father's hand. The pressure from the cool firm palm restored the old man's hope. He had not dared ask the question. In his nightmares he had more than once been dead and bu'ied. He believed that there must "be somethin' in dreams." The horse which in sleep he had seen win in a canter came in a bad fourth after he had put his money on it.

When his fingers relaxed their grip on his son's hand fear of death vanished. The black figure haunting him fluttered out of his imagination. Something of the natural vulgar cocksurenness stirred in him again. "You old fool," it said, "you ain't going off this time. You've only lost your nerve—that's what you've done."

He remained silent for awhile, repressing an inclination to brag about the strength of his constitution lest it might be premature. Gradually this sentiment turned to that dubious sense of gratitude which, in earlier days, drove men to offer sacrifices to their gods.

He chose an odd ewe-lamb.

"How about that woman?" he asked.

Throughout his illness he had refused to see

Mrs. Fortescue, nor had his son mentioned her name.

"Mrs. Fortescue?" replied Philip.

"Yes. Is she still here?"

"Yes."

"What's she doing?"

"Reading the 'Lady's Story Teller' in the drawing-room," answer Philip grimly. "Do you wish to see her?"

"No! Look here, Phil, write to Peter Davies for me, and tell him to sack her. He'll know how."

"Very good," answered the son.

The simple message was sent, and, on the following morning, after an interview with Mr. Davies, Mrs. Fortescue discovered that, as she could be of no use to Morty, she would prefer the seaside. Philip, delighted to see her cab at the door with boxes on the top of it, took a friendly farewell.

"If he wants me, Mr. Phil," she said, "he'll know where to write. Tell him from me he's behaved like a beast."

Then she drove off to Victoria Station.

"Has she gone?" asked the old man.

"Yes," said his son.

"That's all right."

A sultan, dismissing a favourite who had ceased to charm, could scarcely have shown greater indifference. His desire was to get well, recover his appetite, and drink a whole bottle of his favourite champagne. Since Mortimer's ghostly interviews with the strong

Old Man with the scythe, Mrs. Fortescue had become an element of confusion in his house. Besides, Phil hated her, although he never said so ; and somehow Mortimer associated his escape from the terrors lately preparing ambushes for him, to his son's presence.

Meanwhile, whilst old Gordon had been sickening and growing convalescent, another ugly domestic storm had been gathering round the Draytons.

## CHAPTER XXV

DRAYTON was not long in discovering the nature of the Pyrrhic victory which he owed to a mulish determination to prevent his wife's escape. Bitter mortification was concealed under this poor triumph. She came back to him on the simple understanding that the house morally and physically must be big enough for them both. Nothing but the appearances were saved from the wreck of their marriage; but for these he cared very little. Viewed from the church door, as it were, theirs was a marriage which had stood the strain of a serious quarrel; but his wife was careful that Drayton should entertain no illusions. Throughout the negotiations preceding her return to his house, Drayton's sole idea had been to thwart his wife's wishes, but now he discovered his power of inflicting further punishment gone. When they were in the country they were kept apart by their guests. Under such circumstances it was not difficult to avoid friction, nor for the wife to conceal her contempt. There had been a moment when she had half relented. Why should he wish to keep up the fiction, that they were merely an average couple whose domestic happiness was troubled by temporary



misunderstandings, unless he really hoped to regain her affections?

"If he felt for me," she reflected, "what I feel for him, he would not stay in the same house with me a minute."

It was when her letter to Philip received no answer, and Drayton's conduct favoured the idea that he was acting from higher motives than those which she discovered later, that her purpose weakened. She was alone amid tireless voices, all saying "Go back!"

She knew, too, that Drayton had helped to bring out the less gentle side of her nature. Perhaps she was a cold, hard woman. It was partly to prove to herself she was not, that she made the effort to forgive him which was beyond her power. He was dull, unamiable, and, thanks to the process of aversion, she even thought ill-looking. She preferred his absence, thought best of him when she did not see him.

But—compunction wondered—must there not be something morally wrong in the woman capable of almost hating the man she has married, the father of her child—whom she once fancied that she had loved?

As the prospects of escaping decreased, these doubts were redoubled.

"She ought to have taken more pains to manage him," said wise, middle-aged ladies, sitting in judgment on her. "A man of that stamp is just

what his wife makes him. But marry him to one of those cold, proud women, who fancy themselves all intellect and feeling, and he is sure to go wrong!"

She knew what was being said, and even if she had not guessed, Mrs. Stewart was careful that it should not be concealed.

And then her father said :

"I cannot help thinking, Constance, that you are partly responsible for your husband's—er—ah—for Frank's mistakes, I mean. When a man is amused and kept at home this sort of thing does not occur."

The pressure coming from without taught her other views of conjugal conduct than those which she had held. But the husband, who had to be kept by his wife from dabbling in the vulgar vices, seemed in her eyes ridiculous and contemptible. For the view which regarded as unlucky the man who finds his wife a feeble protection against weakness accepted as natural to his sex, she could feel no sympathy.

Yet all the same doubts arose. The world which holds all other dignity cheap but its own, might be right, and she, a highly strung impracticable woman, unfitted for duties which she had not hesitated to undertake.

Thus, for a while, she hesitated, endeavouring to twist her instincts into closer harmony with the inclination of those who found her reconciliation with

her husband useful for the support of their minor conveniences or conventions. It was in this uncertain mood that she agreed to go back to him ; but it was not until after the interview in which she made him understand the unwritten conditions that his real motive dawned upon her.

It was neither dread of scandal, nor the desire to surround his interests with the appearance of a dignified domestic setting, that had guided his conduct, but the determination to inflict a still harder blow on his wife's pride.

When, therefore, the Draytons, reunited only so far as they had not visibly separated, came together again they were no nearer than acquaintances sojourning in the same hotel.

The wife concealed her aversion under a covering of cold politeness which made it none the less felt by the husband, who discovered that he had caged a beautiful, clever woman to be frozen under her resentment. Never once did they move into the intimate circle, occasionally entered even by the most unhappily married.

In the enforced relations of the sexes aversion and contempt are as fire and water withering or drenching all the kindlier buds of affection in their feeble efforts to expand.

"She's just a d——d iceberg," thought the irresponsible polygamist, who still admired his wife's beauty.

And so, in indolent expectation, he waited,

or, perhaps, sought for the woman who was to bring him both compensation and the means of revenge.

Without wealth joint lives, such as theirs, are not possible, but money and adequate establishments afford room for the secret stabling of not a few of the vindictive devils haunting the tragic twilight of the ruined affections. But he had shooting engagements, she had her visits, and their frequent absences made it less difficult to maintain the decorums when they were together.

Mrs. Stewart, watching the experiment with curiosity, was interested. There were, she reflected, few men of means with whom a clever woman cannot manage to live in tolerable comfort when she must.

"The thing's working capitally!" she said one day to her sister, after studying the Draytons at a dinner-party.

"Mr. Drayton told Harold," replied Lady Belchester, "that his wife saves him the expense of a housekeeper!"

"That is just what the vulgar-minded, sneering creature would say," answered Mrs. Stewart. "His wife says nothing."

In the secret chamber of most vain, dull men, Alnaschar, in turban and slippers, sits enthroned, waiting for the humiliation of the princess. Perhaps, if Constance Drayton had lowered her flag and approached her lord's feet, the position might have

been saved. In his uncouth way he even conveyed the hint, but submission to such a master she found morally and physically impossible; and in the fifth month of their pretended reconciliation they were further apart than ever.

"At all events she's had her chance," thought Drayton. His wife was now so completely indifferent that his amatory frolics in Bohemian territory merely increased her contempt for his character. Without her jealousy his clumsy sportiveness among the indulgent nymphs lost its former excitement. His views were crude. A married man, condemned to be a bachelor by an intolerant wife, he naturally created for himself an unseemly grievance; a polygamist by instinct, he believed that he had been driven into the unclean pasture-lands by the tyranny of the woman who owed him allegiance. His logic was that of the Bull or the Goat.

Thus the return to what was still called her home only increased Constance Drayton's dislike for her husband, and added to his determination to give the tottering structure a last contemptuous kick.

Each said in secret, "This cannot go on for ever."

Nor did the ordeal lower the recaptured wife's spirit. It scarcely increased her unhappiness. Before her was a sort of hope. If she had received Philip Gordon's letter six months too late it brought her, when it came, a comfort which she was ashamed

to confess. The spirit of an enduring, unselfish affection haunted its phrases. This man had loved her since he was a boy, and it was even possible that, but for his absence, she might have tempted him to some rash step. Whilst trying for the second time to endure her husband's yoke, she was waiting for the return of a lover whose very delicacy the world in which she lived would have mocked as ridiculous or hypocritical. But the contrast between the lover living on memories and the husband grazing in the rank fields sometimes tortured her with the sense of a beautiful thing wasted.

"If only you were free!" whispered the voices round her pillow, in certain moods.

When Philip Gordon returned she thought of writing to him, but a convict in a gilded prison with a burly, disreputable husband as warder—there was no honourable escape.

Time might bring some cure, but the deeper Drayton plunged into the mire the more persistently she refused to see his wallowings. At last his conduct growing notorious provoked the protests of his father-in-law.

What did it matter, he asked sullenly, if his wife didn't care?

Then the colonel questioned his daughter.

"It is what I expected," she replied.

The discussion moved in a melancholy circle constantly returning to this point.

Then Colonel Madryn, contemplating a situation

for which he and the social conventions were mainly responsible, groaned to his sister, but neither could find a cure.

It was Miss Madryn's opinion that a woman ought to endeavour to convert the husband whose soul (in her creed) was entrusted to the wife's keeping ; but when she tried her theories on her niece she soon discovered that, however well-suited to an amiable form of literature, such views were not remedies for the confusion encompassing her niece's hearth.

"I'll speak to Frank myself," she said ; and she did, but only to the increase of her bewilderment.

What was a poor beggar to do, he asked, who has married an iceberg ? And so the argument drifted into regions whither the modest and still sentimental spinster dared not follow it.

"You are both very wicked," she said to her niece ; but this was as futile as upbraiding a thunderstorm for its noise, or steam for its scalding breath.

In the end the Madryns resigned themselves to what, since it was beyond their control, seemed inevitable, and sat down in gloomy wonder with the inquisitive onlookers to see into what fresh troubles the ill-assorted couple would plunge.

"They've money, youth, good looks, everything," commented the curious Square, "and yet they hate each other so that they never speak, even in public, unless obliged."

"It's her fault," argued Mrs. Parkington. "She

had no business to marry him if she intended to let him go to the dogs with other women and every form of dissipation. I respect the Madryns,—they are one of the oldest families in England,—but their daughter must have been most badly brought up.”

From her intimate friends Miss Madryn no longer concealed the truth; but although Mrs. Parkington was not of the number, rumour allowed her fully to appreciate “the wretchedness of this most unhappy marriage.”

The gossip reached old Mortimer Gordon through his valet during his convalescence, and added to the zest of recovery. Now that he was no longer frightened of dying, and able to eat a whole sole for dinner, he began to be aggressive again.

“Shouldn’t have let the girl go back to that chap,” he said to Green. “Serves ’em all jolly well right!”

He much enjoyed the details of Drayton’s misconduct, which reached Green quite fresh from the Madryn kitchen.

Mortimer was on the verge of coarsely plunging into this attractive topic with his son, but an instinct distantly resembling discretion, checked the inclination. During his illness Philip’s influence over him had much increased, and he desired, out of a sense of gratitude, not to offend his son.

“After all,” he reflected, “there’s a sort o’ Providence



in these things. Madryn'll end in getting the set down he deserves."

The old fellow mistook this resentful sentiment for pious resignation, and decided to resume his place in his pew whenever returning strength and the east wind vexing the buds in the Square encouraged his devotions.

## CHAPTER XXVI

EARLY in March Philip Gordon called at "The Sisters'" on Mrs. Stewart at her request, and was received with a certain critical air, the cause of which he guessed.

Her manner seemed to say, "But you might have done more to help us!"

For those able to read them she was full of signals, approving or disapproving, deploring or suggesting. Thus he guessed that his father's conduct during his absence had been watched by her with secret amusement, and that his own sudden departure for Australia had been resented as savouring of disloyalty.

She began sympathetically with touches of candour to advertise her intuitive grasp of things. She consoled with him on account of the trouble with his father,—old people left to themselves would get out of hand!—still, she thought, things might have been worse (she meant the foolish old gentleman might have given him a stepmother), and, at any rate, he, Mr. Philip Gordon, was now master of the situation again.

Here she stopped, and, fixing him with the pathetic lights of her eyes, exclaimed:

"Poor Connie Drayton! Of course, you have heard?"

"That they are not getting on?" he blundered.

"Getting on, Mr. Gordon! why it is a sort of living death,"—for she could be melodramatic when the sentiments tempted,—"Connie Drayton is utterly miserable."

"Why did they patch it up? The quarrel, I mean," he went on.

"Because there was no *man* to advise," replied Sybil Stewart. "The poor soul's heart is broken!"

"Have you seen her?" he asked anxiously.

"Not lately," she replied, "she is too unhappy. He is behaving infamously!"

But as she spoke a familiar voice was heard on the stairs, and Mrs. Drayton entered the club unpursued by the tragic cloud created to decorate her wrongs—an absence of dramatic completeness felt almost painfully by Sybil Stewart.

"We never even heard the rustle of your wings, Connie!" she said.

"You were talking of me, then?" she answered, smiling serenely on them both.

"Of course we were!"

Whatever embarrassment was felt was exhibited solely by the young man. He remembered the letter which now seemed so paltry and weak; and his reply on which she could not have acted without sacrificing those very household gods of whose security her return to her husband had been the price!

Yet the smile with which she greeted him was reassuring.

Could this be the woman whose life was "a living death?"

But what place is their for tragedy, he wondered, in a society built up on conventions a thousand years old? He listened to the women about him talking of the newest books, the latest plays, of the most amusing scandals. The tragic was the remotest element of all.

"What did you think of Australia, Mr. Gordon?" calmly asked the lady with the broken heart. "When England is too hot for us, Frankie—little Frankie, I mean—and I can go there."

The club resumed its accustomed murmurs. The odour of tea and hot cakes was in the air.

But when Mrs. Drayton was speaking to another member of the club, Sybil Stewart made an effort to restore the sombre tints wiped from her picture by the subject of it.

"If Prometheus had been a woman, Mr. Gordon," she said, "we should never have heard of the vulture!"

"I can't imagine a member of 'The Sisters' suffering from—a vulture!" said he.

But she ignored his retort, and went on, speaking earnestly, in a low voice:

"I wanted to talk to you of Mrs. Drayton, but there is no time, nor must she guess what I have said. It is impossible for her to live

much longer with her husband. Save her if you can."

She rushed it because it was too late for fencing, and, before he had found an answer, joined a group of women in animated talk with a popular actor.

Mrs. Drayton was listening, too, quite undismayed, it seemed to him, by the fresh disasters threatening her. But her grave, quiet eyes, which saw everything, did not miss the quick manœuvre of her friend, and, after a moment, she returned to the chair at Gordon's side which she had lately quitted, and set his heart beating with her question.

"Please, Mr. Gordon, will you tell me what Mrs. Stewart told you of me—and my melancholy affairs?"

"She spoke of your—anxieties."

He hesitated for the mildest word.

"Thank you," she replied. "They shall not terrify me. But tell me of your adventures in Australia, those at least must be more original than my worries."

He looked at her in doubt a moment, but saw she trusted him.

"There is nothing to tell you," said he.

"What! nothing? Mr. Locksley says you did admirably."

"He is always kind,—at least to me,—but any other man with a little law could have done as well. There is,"—and her eyes encouraged his answer,—  
"there is nothing to tell you except that, if your letter had been written five days earlier, I should never have gone."

"I know," she answered.

"You understood then?" he asked.

"Perfectly, and I am grateful to you."

"I shall feel the same always—nothing can change me."

He was across the borderland and wondering at his own daring. The serenity her fearlessness gave her had vanished. On her voice there floated the ghost of a caress. His respectful and almost boyish affection, that asked for nothing but gave everything, was very dear to her. Accustomed to admiration and flattery—and since her marriage unmoved by them—this homage touched her profoundly.

"I ought not to say this," he said, "but you will understand. There is so little for me to give that can help to make you happy ; but I gave you all I had years ago, when I was a boy and we first met. Since then I have only thought of you."

He was pleading like a raw youth, she was an accomplished woman of the world, but her imaginary sense of their disparity in innocence secretly perturbed her as she wondered at the purity of the affection shining in his face. Although a year older than herself it almost seemed that he might have been little Frankie's elder brother.

Behind what she felt was the unfathomed mystery of feeling which words cannot sound.

Before she could reply, however, she grew conscious that Sybil Stewart was watching them, and quickly recovered her presence of mind.

"Thank you for your friendship," she said, "I shall not forget ; good-bye !"

She held out her hand, let it rest a moment affectionately in his, and left the club.

Her carriage was waiting at the door, and she drove home under the spell which the consciousness of possessing the unselfish and loyal love of an honest man throws, even on a woman whose illusions have vanished.

Philip Gordon, like her love for books, for pictures, for nature, and for children, represented one of the forces saving her from complete moral contamination. She had married a man, half a satyr and wholly a fool, but out of the wreck of her innocence had preserved ideals.

But Gordon remained standing near the big pastel drawing of the three shadowy female figures, half wreathed in luminous mist, a picture purchased by Lady Belchester in order to encourage a struggling artist, and accepted as symbolical of the purpose of the club, although no member could explain how. That the figures were unclothed, save for the rosy encircling clouds, and the local habitation of the club above a famous court dressmaker, were simple facts increasing the difficulty of logical interpretation.

Gordon was looking at the picture, but without seeing it, when Mrs. Stewart startled him by saying :

"So you have had it out at last !"

"Had what out ?" he asked abruptly.

"Never mind ; there is no sluttish complacency about Connie Drayton."

But he saw the mischief in her pretty face, and although he knew that she was his friend, refused to be tempted into confidences.

"Your picture," he said, "represents the mystic birth of your club, doesn't it?"

"No ; three women who have lost their clothes. You might trust me, Mr. Gordon."

"And so I do, Mrs. Stewart."

But at the end of the room the piano, never silent for long, tinkled, and a new tenor gave him the opportunity of escape which he sought.

He went home to dinner at which, for the first since his return, his father joined him.

"It's a dev'lish pleasant thing to dine like a gentleman again," said the old man.



## CHAPTER XXVII

AT least once a week Drayton, referring to his relations with his wife, said to himself, "This sort of thing can't go on!"

He had made her come back to him because he knew that she desired to escape. The victory had been his, but there were no fruits to it.

What was the fun of living with a woman who treated you as though she had met you at a dinner-party the day before?

Drayton put this question to himself, but could answer it only in one way. He had intended to punish her for despising him, but found her invulnerable to any weapon of his. Her contempt was her shield. Divorce between them was as complete as aversion and pride on her part and infidelities on his could make it. Sometimes, when they chanced to be alone in the same room, he caught in her eyes a look which he interpreted as hate. She despised herself for having tried to love a man who could not speak in her presence without shocking her taste. This was the feeling he misread. Still, in her disillusion, there was something pathetic. His

stupidity, once mistaken for the boyish frankness of the sportsman, now stood revealed in all its vain and barren dulness, yet once they had laughed together as naturally as children.

Sometimes she wondered whether it might not have been possible to save the man from himself, but resentment stifled her powers of pity. He had dragged her to the threshold of an existence into which no high-minded woman could look without suffering moral degradation.

For a time Drayton's vanity and dulness prevented him from realising his wife's real feelings. He believed in "his power over women," and his conceit actually expected this vulgar spell to work for the second time on the woman whose disgust he had excited!

"She'll come round!" thought my lord, who had the support of Sir George's opinion that "they all did."

But, after five months' trial, he recognised that they were further apart than ever, and that, unless he resorted to open brutality, he was powerless to to strike her.

Her firmness and pride were more enduring than his obstinacy. She never complained now, nor argued, nor mocked him, but, consulting his wishes as an intelligent housekeeper, fulfilled all the social duties expected of his wife.

So far as her conduct was measurable by the community of their interests it revealed no flaw!

"She is so horribly clever!" he thought, half remorsefully.

But then their common interests were of so little account now!

An expert upper-servant, a supervising maiden-aunt, might have cared for them just as efficiently.

And, as the secret and unspoken rancour grew between them, he began blaming himself for his folly in forcing her to come back to him. "What was the good of it?"

Sometimes as they passed on stairs or landings, silently as strangers might in the same hotel, he felt tempted to turn and beat and curse her.

"Her whole life," he thought, "is one infernal defiance of me!"

Even their joint interests, as centred in the little boy, gave no cordial glow to their steadily decreasing aversion.

When he played with Frankie and the boy cried, it was the nurse who entreated him not to be too rough!

Having thus reconstructed his domestic life on the basis of a malignant, domineering obstinacy, and finding it haunted by upbraiding, contemptuous whispers, which, although they never cried aloud, penetrated only the deeper into his understanding, he impatiently waited for an opportunity to wreck what he had been at the pains of re-creating.

At last the beautiful adoring, fair-haired consolation

sprung out on him from the ambush of the unexpected. A very silly but very pretty woman fell in love with Drayton. His six feet, his black moustache, his big voice, with the bully's note in it, caught her heart in an enchanted vice, and held it there powerless and panting. If he had been a real hero of romance he could not have done more.

She had married a clever little artist well on the way to the Academy, whose admiring brush had painted her a dozen times; but having grown tired of his yellow beard, of his thoughtful blue eyes, of his wit which she could not understand, of his art which she could not appreciate, she had flung herself at Frank Drayton. He was her "dark Greek god"—her everything that was sentimental and silly.

Each found restful the dulness which they shared and mistook for sympathy. Cleverness for them was only a form of affectation.

Mrs. Calverley Pitt—Calverley had painted most people of distinction from ambassadors and statesmen down to opulent aldermen—had some slight acquaintance with the Draytons.

Mrs. Drayton's manner to Mr. Drayton "positively appalled" Mrs. Pitt by its iciness!

She and Drayton began by confessing their sorrows, and ended by embracing in Mr. Pitt's studio.

This they finally did with a recklessness that provoked Mr. Pitt's jealous suspicions, and, on the afternoon on which Constance Drayton returned home from her accidental meeting with Philip Gordon

at "The Sisters," Drayton received two letters : one from Mr. Pitt, requesting him never to visit his house again ; the other from Mrs. Pitt, entreating him to rescue her from a position which a boundless passion for himself had rendered insupportable.

When his wife entered her boudoir, with Gordon's words still knocking at her heart, Drayton followed her there to throw a final stone at "her infernal pride."

"Well?" she questioned in surprise, for it was many weeks since he had invaded her domain.

"I want a talk," he answered. "I'm pretty sick of the rotten life we're leading, and it's best you should know."

"I am not responsible for it," she answered, rising from her chair.

He watched her a moment. As she stood against the light a sunbeam, caught by a mirror, was thrown on her beautiful hair. The effect was charming, but he felt, almost with a sense of relief, that her beauty no longer affected him. The woman he wanted was waiting,—a woman whose beauty was the boast of her set and of the illustrated papers,—a rival of whom his wife might with reason be jealous.

"Why do you pretend our ridiculous life is all my fault?" he said—his effrontery speaking for him. "Any one you like to ask will tell you it's been made impossible, only because you wouldn't take the second chance I gave you." But the elation which his

manner ill-concealed made her suspect some brutal trap.

"You understand the terms on which I consented to live with you again," she replied quietly.

"Terms? Why not call them divorce at your decree?"

"Some conditions are better without a name."

He moved up and down the room restlessly; she stood still, the light still shining around her head like a protecting glory.

He stopped opposite her suddenly, and said:

"Suppose I were to tell you that I'm fond of another woman—really fond, you know, fond enough to marry her if the thing were made possible—what would you say?"

"Tell you to go to her at once, and never to let me see you again!"

"You mean that?"

"Can you doubt it?"

"But what about the fuss and all that sort of thing? Could you stand that?"

"If you understood me, you wouldn't ask!"

"But there's little Frankie?"

"He must take his chance."

"And you?"

"I'll take mine, too."

Then he fired his direct shot.

"Do you know Mrs. Calverley Pitt?"

"Yes."

"What do you think of her?"

"She is a beautiful woman."

"Well, she has fallen in love with me. I like her better than I ever liked any woman before. Pitt has found it out, and forbidden me the house."

He ceased speaking, and looked at her. The shot had told.

"Mrs. Pitt must be a feeble fool. You have behaved—as I expected."

Her contempt stung.

"You forget I love this woman," said he.

"You can't love any one but yourself, you never could."

"Can't I? You'll see. You did your best to send me to the devil. Perhaps she'll save me. I mean to bolt with her to-night!"

He moved towards the door. She was dazed. She seemed to be dealing with one of the evil forces behind nature.

At the door he turned, and said:

"You'll help to square the matter with the lawyers, and that sort of thing?"

"I'll make it as easy as I can."

But she had scarcely spoken before regretting what she had said.

He went to his room, and she heard the bell ring for his man.

She remained standing where he had left her, in doubt and agitation. Could she let this family be ruined to restore her freedom? At first she had welcomed the sacrifice, almost as a co-conspirator,

now she was ashamed to contemplate it with apathy.

The Calverley Pitts had no children ; but the man whom she knew and liked adored his wife.

Was the thing preventable? Could she prevent it? The vision of the little painter, with his fair beard, clever face, and pride in the beauty of his wife, was haunting her.

The crime was too odious! The woman ought to be warned.

And so at last the generous side of her nature hurried her to the street.

Surely one woman was sacrifice enough for such a man!

A hansom was passing. She stopped it, and drove to South Kensington ; but the numbers of the street were arranged with the caprice common in London and half an hour elapsed before the cabman stopped at the door complacently bearing the name "Calverley Pitt" in neat brass letters.

She rang nervously, in terror of a threatening scene.

A man answered the bell. Mrs. Pitt was not at home.

"Mr. Pitt then?"

Mr. Pitt was out, too ; but might be back in half an hour. Would she wait?

"I will wait," she said, and gave her card to the man who, reading it, evidently grasped the meaning of the visit. His manner changed and there was suppressed excitement in his manner.



"He knows!" she thought.

She followed him upstairs to the studio which she knew well—a great room, swallowing up half the house, full of canvases and draperies, and lighted by one tall window through which the moving sky of a showery spring evening looked down.

On an easel was an admirable portrait of Mrs. Pitt, the paint hardly dry.

She knew it was for the next Academy, and had heard it praised as "Calverley Pitt's best work."

It was pleasanter to look up at the sky dappled with shine and shower. And so she waited in the silence of the house, wondering. Had the woman left her home? Was the husband seeking her?

The quiet of the house, the vacant, lonely room, the thickening shadows, the sudden sleet showers, whipping the tall window with an invisible lash, seemed elements in the fabric of a gathering sorrow.

The studio held the ghost of the artist's dead happiness. Pity was her prevailing feeling. In her detachment she almost forgot herself.

But what was happening?

The clock struck half-past six. It was almost dark. The servant came and switched on the electric light. The new portrait smiling at her in irony, seemed to say, "Look at me. Am I not beautiful? but I'm running away from the man who painted me!"

## CHAPTER XXVIII

MOST commonplace scandals are constructed out of the sorrow of the few by the levity of the many. The further we are removed from their squalid centre the keener the sense of pitiless curiosity becomes. In all ages the wife or husband left to weep by the abandoned hearth has been an object of derision. The very blamelessness of the victim lowers, in vulgar minds, the character of the human sympathy excited.

This was the case with Calverley Pitt. When his acquaintances heard that his wife had "bolted with Drayton," they said "poor little chap!" with the usual unconfessed sense of superiority underlying regret of this nature. They of course were not the sort of men from whom wives eloped; but men of the world who understand women and know how to manage them. But a little, dreamy fellow like Calverley Pitt, married to such a beauty, too! Why! what on earth else could you expect?"

The unhappy man, who had expected something very different, shut himself in the studio with the portrait whilst the chilly March sky shone down on his tortured loneliness.

Later his wrongs and suffering found relief in painting; and critics who had learnt the elements of Latin said that his brush had acquired an almost Virgilian sympathy for the sorrows of humanity.

The greatest help to his art which his wife ever gave him was to leave him, although he never suspected it.

At "The Sisters'" the elopement aroused a profound excitement. The lady's name was actually up for election. The members congratulated themselves and the committee that there had not been time to elect her; the proposer and seconder removed her name from the notice board, as they inaccurately declared "at the candidate's request." But, although Mrs. Stewart and her sisters insisted that Mrs. Drayton's conduct had been "irreproachable," they were unable to protect their friend's reputation against the malicious tongues. Women who did not like her agreed that she had certainly helped to bring the catastrophe about by her conduct to her husband.

"My dear!" they said, "she couldn't even bear to look at him."

But the impression made on the club was trifling when compared to the uncharitable feelings called forth in the unforgiving breast of old Mortimer Gordon. The only man from whom he concealed his ferocious satisfaction was his son. He felt "it wasn't quite the thing" to brag about it to Phil. But he induced Peter Davies to come to him under

a pretence that he was anxious for advice about some mining shares. Peter, who had heard the story from his communicative client, Drayton's valet, now out of a place, imparted the ugliest details to his friend with the amiable purpose of "cheering him up."

"The servants say Mrs. Drayton's actually glad to get rid of her husband," said Davies. "Did you ever hear such a thing?"

"Don't yer believe it," said Mortimer. "That's only their d——d Madryn pride! She's had the impudence taken out of her, I bet! I don't know what Drayton settled on her, but it strikes me she'll have to go back to the old people again. Wonder how me lady'll like that!"

"They say the colonel was in an awful stew when he heard," said the judicious Davies.

"An' well he might be," said Mortimer. "That chap Drayton only got the girl to come back to him after the last row so that he might do the chucking himself. That's the sort of man he is! Poor old Madryn! I do pity him! This comes o' your pride! He's gone abroad—It'll be or somewhere. Couldn't face it out! No wonder. The daughter's staying down on the south coast. Lady Belchester lent her a place, Phil tells me. That lot means to stick to her, it seems."

On the evening following this unpleasant conversation, Mortimer spoke to his son in terms of hypocritical sympathy.

"A frightful disgrace for the Madryns, Phil, ain't it?"

His son's reply, however, did not encourage this form of complacency.

"Colonel Madryn, I have no doubt, will bear it with his usual dignity," said Philip. "I can't see that the disgrace in any way touches him. Mrs. Drayton of course will shortly obtain the relief which the law affords."

"D—— his high and mighty tones!" thought the old man. "What relief d'yer mean?" he asked irritably; "a divorce?"

"Certainly."

And, then, suddenly, for the first time, a faint shadow of anxiety fell on Mortimer. By some coarse yet simple method of reasoning he had persuaded himself that the Madryns would stop short of the Divorce Court, partly to withhold from Drayton the freedom to marry again, which he evidently sought, partly to preserve to their daughter the advantages accruing to the wife of a man whose wealth must be shortly increased by the death of his mother.

"You ain't seen Mrs. Drayton since he left her, have you, Phil?" his father asked, assuming an air of detachment.

"No," said Philip. "But I have seen her friend, Mrs. Stewart."

"Is the pore wife cut up, Phil?"

"Not in the least. She will be a free woman again. Drayton won't defend the case."

"She'll be a 'divorcy' though ; and what's one man's leavings isn't gen'r'lly another man's choosings."

"You forget, sir, that the lady is a friend of mine," said his son indignantly.

And here the discussion might have grown heated had not Green appeared with his master's tonic, and the old man remembered that he "wasn't strong enough yet to have a row."

The conversation, however, left him so anxious, that on the following day he sent for Davies again.

"You don't suppose Phil 'ud be fool enough to marry her, Pete?" he said.

"Not a ghost of a chance!" said Davies, bent on humouring his client. "Phil has only what he makes and you allow him. That ain't enough to run a smart woman on, living in the set she's used to."

"D'you think she'd marry him if I'd go halves with Phil?" asked Mortimer, recalling the offer which the Madryn had contemptuously rejected.

"I won't go so far as to say she wouldn't, Mortimer ; but lor' we haven't reached the decree yet."

"It seems to me then I've got the whip hand of 'em," said the old fellow thoughtfully. "I'd do a good deal for Phil, but it won't run to that this time."

"But he was not entirely reassured, and henceforward whatever satisfaction his enemy's overthrow afforded him was neutralised by apprehension lest the changes might rob him of his son.

But, meanwhile, the days were passing, bringing with them that gradual readjustment to altered conditions which man's adaptability to his social environment so effectively demands. Even a matrimonial scandal ceases to have the weight of a scandal when no secrets are revealed and lawyers permitted to work the machinery at their own convenient pressure.

The princess had knelt at Alnaschar's feet at last, and he was anxious to make her all the atonement in his power ; nor did the heart-broken little painter, the victim who suffered most, stand in the way of the woman who had deserted him.

By the time the chestnut-trees were in leaf some remedy for the confusion which Drayton had created was already in sight.

Mortimer Gordon was well again, but aged somewhat and shaken and subject to occasional attacks of giddiness which frightened him, for he was frequently heard to say that "no chap can expect to live for ever." In May one of his old friends and boon companions died, and although "desirous," as he said, "of rend'ring an old pal ev'ry respect," he confessed to Philip that "he didn't feel up to the funeral." It was, therefore, his son who stood in Brompton cemetery in his stead, with the little gathering of betting-men, prosperous jockeys, and sporting correspondents.

"James an' me were much of an age," sighed old Mortimer. "He died of a sort o' decline, 'noomonia' the doctors called it. Luckily my lungs are sound."

On the evening of the funeral he dined at a sporting club with several acquaintances—mourners at James's obsequies. The little festival assumed something of the character of a wake; and, on the following morning, Mortimer felt so much upset by his excesses that he sent for his medical man, who informed him that if he, Mortimer, were not careful, he, the doctor, "would not be answerable for the consequences."

"Why! you don't mean fits, doctor?" shuddered the old man, from his pillows.

"What I mean is this, Mr. Gordon," said the doctor; "no man of your age can drink a bottle of champagne followed by a bottle of port with impunity."

"Seems to me, Green," said Mortimer, to his man, when the doctor was gone, "that I ain't got much left to live for."

This melancholy feeling kept him in bed till luncheon-time, vainly trying to diagnose his ailments, wondering whether the doctor considered him a likely subject for "fits"; if so for what sort?

What was he coming to? He couldn't drink nor smoke much. What was this a sign of? His will was all right, Phil was to have everything. What a pity Phil didn't trust him more! How did he spend his time? He knew he went to Chambers and was getting a decent practice, but how about the women? At his age he had run after them a lot! Davies thought the lad didn't care for 'em. But



that wasn't natural. Mortimer wondered whether "that Drayton woman was at the bottom of it all?" She was still at Fisherspoint on the south-west coast, in the villa which the Belchesters had placed at her service. Mortimer "had had it all from Peter Davies who had got it" from Drayton's former valet, for whom he had found a place. The man was in touch with the servants at "The Cottage," and the old man knew that hitherto his son had not been to Fisherspoint.

Still, he was not satisfied. There were the risks that his son might marry the "divorcy," as old Gordon called her, unconscious that he was speaking a foreign tongue. It was an intolerable idea that his money might some day enable the woman to "cut the dash," which in his eyes was necessary to "her pride."

"Fancy thinkin' of marryin' a woman chucked by another man!" he said one day to Peter Davies, to try him.

"The weakness isn't uncommon," Davies replied diplomatically.

"If I thought Phil 'ud do it, Peter," said old Gordon, "I'm d——d if he should have my money!"

Now Davies knew the terms of his client's will. If Mortimer's money wasn't left to his son, to whom should it be left but to the old man's old friends of whom he was the most deserving? He knew already that he was to benefit by it to a slight extent, because, when Gordon had consulted him on the

subject five years before, the fact that his name had been mentioned had prevented him from assisting at its execution. It had been consequently drawn up by a former clerk of Davies's, who, as a solicitor, lived on the legal crumbs which fell from his own prosperous table. When, therefore, Gordon asked him to "keep an eye on Phil, and let him know whether he was still philanderin' after the 'divorcy,'" Davies said "all right" without any compunction, and took care to find out, through Drayton's late valet, who was still deep in his debt, what Mrs. Drayton was doing and whom she saw.

Whenever Davies and Mortimer met some variant of the following conversation passed between them.

"Phil been down to see that woman, Pete?"

"No; Lady Belchester was down there last week. That's the only visitor."

"What a steady chap it is! Never goes on the loose, or drinks too much or what not. Very different chap to what I was at his age."

"I believe you, Mortimer, my boy," Davies would answer.

But a day came, it was about a fortnight after Mortimer's melancholy morning in bed, when the old man's suspicions were savagely aroused.

Philip knew something of what was in his father's mind, but without suspecting that he was being watched.

There was the strongest reason why he should not see Constance Drayton yet. Both Lady Belchester

and Mrs. Stewart pointed out "the unwisdom"—the word was Mrs. Stewart's choice—of a meeting between them at present. Drayton was vindictive; and although still wandering about the Continent with the lady who had prematurely assumed his name, waiting for the court to set him free, he had placed his affairs in the hands of Sir George Arran, with the injunction that he was "not to stand any nonsense, if the lady showed herself inclined to play the fool before she was out of the wood."

But in a fortnight the suit would be heard, and Mrs. Stewart decided that Philip Gordon and Constance Drayton ought to meet. She wrote, therefore, to "dear Mr. Gordon," from "The Cottage," Fisherspoint, suggesting that he should come down for a few days. Unfortunately there was no room in "The Cottage" but there was a capital little hotel there and excellent golf-links. She thought the change would do him good, and both she and her friend Connie Drayton would be delighted to see him. "We expect," she added, "that Mr. Locksley is coming too."

That afternoon Locksley looked in at the club and said:

"Hullo Gordon! I hear you're going down to Fisherspoint to play golf to-morrow. I have a good mind to come too."

And they both went.

Philip told his father that he was going out of town for a few days, to play golf with Locksley.

"Where to?" asked the old man.

"Somewhere on the coast," said his son.

He felt that if he had said "to Fisherspoint" he would have provoked an explosion.

Mortimer telegraphed for Peter Davies, and said, the moment the lawyer appeared in the red morocco study:

"Look here, Peter, Phil's after that woman!"

"No?" exclaimed Davies, who was not surprised.

"But we'll soon find out."

## CHAPTER XXIX

"THE COTTAGE" was built by Lord Belchester's grandmother, a lady of sentiment whose verses under another name may still be read by the curious in the "keepsakes" of her time. A great family needs an abode for honouring its softer moods. These the pretty villa, surrounded by sloping lawns, covered with creeping vegetation which the mild west-country skies encourage, was built to satisfy. Whenever there was a marriage in the family you might generally read, in the *Fashionable Intelligence*, that "the bride and bridegroom left London for 'The Cottage,'—the idyllic marine residence of his lordship,—where the happy couple were to spend their honeymoon." Sometimes the Belchesters lent it to deserving friends who sought retirement from the world, whether from excess of happiness or melancholy. Five miles from a railway station, with the sea washing the sloping cliff beneath the southern boundary wall, protected by a great granite headland from the westerly squalls, and by a range of hills from the north-easterly winds, it was the fit home for delicate, aristocratic sorrow, or for that fragile delight which is its sister.

When, therefore, Mrs. Stewart said to Lady Belchester: "You ought to offer Connie 'The Cottage.'" Lady Belchester replied, after a brief mental survey of the position: "I really think we might. At all events it will show that the right sort of people are on her side."

The alternative of going abroad with the colonel and Miss Madryn,—her aunt, she felt, would talk too much!—did not, as a solace, greatly attract Constance Drayton.

"A generous offer and kindly meant," said her father. "I think you had better accept it."

The little portion of the world looking on was amused or impressed, according to its pose or taste.

When Mr. Locksley heard of the arrangement he said: "Poor Mrs. Drayton is mourning, under the wide wing of the Belchesters, the loss of a husband she hopes never to see again!"

Observers, further from the facts, considered that the Belchesters had shown the greatest good feeling in giving their support to a grievously wronged wife, although they thought that "The Cottage" "was only used for honeymoons."

In May—for once genial, with warm sunshine and blossom—Fisherspoint is delightful. On the day following the arrival of Locksley and Philip Gordon, the sky and sea were in dazzling alliance. They had arrived too late on the previous evening to call at "The Cottage"—distant, by a winding road, over the cliffs, through furze, gorse, and fern,

a mile from their inn. But a letter awaited them, addressed to Mr. Locksley by Mrs. Stewart, inviting them to come over early, "unless they preferred golf."

"Would you rather play golf, Gordon?" Locksley asked.

"No, I wouldn't," said Gordon.

"The other is a less dangerous game," said his friend.

"I'm prepared for all the risks," replied the other.

They followed the path, made by the coastguard, to the other side of the bay, where, invisible to all but the gulls, behind groves of rare conifers and evergreens, two ladies sat on the lawn waiting for them.

Down the slope, under a group of stone pines, which shone out against the blue sea in the bright morning with an almost southern lustre, little Frankie was playing with a tall nurse, the ominous young woman who, through the medium of an amatory correspondence with Mr. Drayton's late valet, conveyed to the curious eye of Mr. Peter Davies a fairly accurate picture of her mistress's life at Fisherspoint. According to this observer, it was "as dull as ditch-water, and you never saw a soul."

But Mr. Gordon was coming, and "somehow" nurse expected "things would happen."

At that moment she was wondering how the visitor would be received, and why he had stayed away so long. Of course she knew "there were the appearances," still she held her own views. She had heard scraps of enlightening conversation between

her mistress and Mrs. Stewart ; she considered that "Mr. Drayton had treated his wife vilely" ; she also perceived that "his running off with another woman" had not provoked the grief usually associated with deserted wives. "Most women are very much alike," she had said, in a letter addressed to the valet, and posted on the previous evening, "and I should not wonder if even she tried to console herself a bit, just as I should if a man treated me as he treated her. Cold though she may have been and proud, she's always been nice to me, and I speak of people as I find them !"

It was this impartial warning which reached Peter Davies and set him wondering "why the deuce the young fellow had been sent for, and whether it meant business !"

But, unconscious of what nurse might be thinking or writing, Constance Drayton and Mrs. Stewart were talking eagerly in the sunshine. In the hills behind them larks were carolling ; young lambs bleating ; the thrushes in the garden were singing in emulation ; whilst high in the blue above, a sea-mew, flying across from windy headland to headland, looking down on the bright flower-beds and velvet lawns, broke the silence of the solemn upper air with a plaintive cry.

Mrs. Stewart ceased talking a moment. She was in her worldliest mood from which the sweet melancholy of the passing gull recalled her for a moment.



Mrs. Stewert had come to the conclusion that it was time to take a purely practical and unsentimental view of Connie's affairs. As the first step in this direction she felt that her friend must "make up her mind about Mr. Gordon."

"You know why I asked him down?" she said.

"Because you wanted Mr. Locksley to play golf with, and Mr. Locksley wanted a companion," Mrs. Drayton replied.

"No; because he is over head and ears in love with you. He has told me so over and over again."

"I am sure he has not!"

"Not in words—if he had I shouldn't have believed him—but in deeds. No one could have behaved better! Then he'll be very well off when the dreadful old man dies. I don't mean to say there need be any unbecoming hurry; but I do hope the time has come when you will let him feel that perhaps some day his fidelity may be rewarded. He won't care for another woman for at least ten years, and you can afford to run a little risk—even to the extent of waiting until the old man dies, although personally I shouldn't advise that."

But the gate-bell rang. Mrs. Stewart exclaimed:

"There they are!"

Then she glanced critically at her friend, whose pretty summer dress was not below her exacting standard.

"You ought to feel like Guinevere when Lancelot blew his bugle-horn at her gates," she said. "But

stay here. I'll receive them indoors and bring them out."

She had spent two whole days of solitude at "The Cottage" in the cause of friendship, but here was the prospect of changes possibly dramatic. Would the comedy, whose course she had been trying to guide, shape itself neatly and in consonance with her wishes?

It had been whispered by a voice, to which authority was attributed that "she was not so young as she fancied," and it now seemed to her in search of consolation, that her interest,—“her almost girlish interest!”—in her friend's sorrows disproved this ugly charge. The elderly, she reasoned, a little oddly, perhaps, are never unselfish.

And so she fluttered off.

Constance Drayton remained seated in the May sunshine. Over the tops of the pines shone the sea. On the horizon gleamed a few white sails. Across the bay the sturdy, brown smacks were putting out with the tide. From the hills and the woods the pastoral sounds reached her soothingly, floating seaward. The morning basked under the shadow of the deep peace. Within her a new emotion throbbed, bearing sweet lassitude to her senses and lulling her brain.

Then she glanced down to the group of pines. Little Frankie and his nurse had disappeared. She rose and sought a point in the garden whence the grey beach could be seen, and there, on a patch of

soft, yellow sand, she beheld the boy, his bright hair shining in the radiant air. The world was under magic lights. The chilly resolutions on which pride had fixed her feet seemed sliding from her. Something whispered—it might have been the ring-dove in the dwarf-oak—"only fools scorn love!"

When she turned, Philip Gordon was coming to meet her; and from her welcoming glance the barriers of reticence and coldness had fallen. He beheld the same face and eyes, sadder, perhaps, but sweeter, that he had first loved years ago in the Swiss garden.

They spoke of the perfection of the spring weather, of the beauty of the place, till the others joined them; and, then, for a little while, they sat and made a pretence to talk in the shade of the trees. But, before long, Mrs. Stewart, who read her friend as a sailor reads the face of the sky, took Mr. Locksley, to whose many accomplishments botany was added, to see an orchid—the pride of the hothouse. Then embarrassment fell on them. The house seemed watching them suspiciously through the French windows.

But Gordon rushed ungracefully at what he had come to say.

"You will be free"—stumbling awkwardly at the word—"before the end of June."

"Yes. The case will be undefended."

"I know. Perhaps I oughtn't to speak yet——"

"Before I am quite out of the wood, as a cynic would say," she suggested half bitterly.

"Oh, I'm a lumpish fool, I know," he broke in. "Ever since I met you something has been between us. I can't find myself when I'm with you. You know the sort of shot that has been tied to my leg? You know what is against us?"

He was vague enough, but she felt his father's shadow falling over them.

"Nothing," she interrupted, "nothing!" touched more by his manner than his words. "At least it never meant anything to me."

"You know we used to race—I mean to make a book—under another name?" he went on.

"I know everything!"

"Then you know I have always loved you?"

She made no answer, but her silence said that she knew.

But they had reached a point where definite words are no longer requisite to meaning. All that is unsaid voice and eyes convey. The look in her face touched him with a magic caress. The spring, audibly murmuring round them, sank into their blood.

"What do you want of me?" she asked, scarcely knowing what she said.

"Everything you can give me. I've been starving. I never even thought of any woman. If you only knew!"

And she read and never doubted the passionate sincerity of his face. After her disillusion with a polygamic mate, such fidelity was beautiful. Here

was a man to whom she had given nothing, not even the fluttering ghost of a kiss, yet he had been true to her. And behind his stalwart manhood and handsome, affectionate face she again found the "dear boy" with the tenderest clasp of her memory.

"Ah! how I wish we could both go back to school again in Switzerland," she sighed, her eyes filling with tears, "and start again from there! We were happier then."

"I shall be very happy if you'll try to care for me!"

"But I do—I do. Only you don't realise for what you are asking."

"For the woman I love—that's all!"

"No; for the moral wreck of the woman. Think of the abysses into which I have been dragged—of what I have gone through, of what I have learnt. I'm just a piece of wreckage swept to you on the tide of—the Divorce Court."

She was profoundly moved, and only the pained look on his face checked her.

"You are a poor innocent—a beautiful dove with shining head—caught in a storm, shaken and tossed, perhaps, but that's all. How happy you would be if I had the creating of your world."

Then they were silent—she tired and pale from the swing of the tumult. They heard the bleating of the lambs from the moors, the thrushes in the bushes, the silver tinkle of a hundred larks high up in the soft blue.

"Let us look at the sea," he said.

She rose in gentle obedience. They crossed the lawns, and opened a gate leading to the winding path. Suddenly the splendid horizons of green and grey, of the headlands knee-deep in the silver tide and all the wonders of the sea flashed on them. The spring stirred deeper in their blood.

## CHAPTER XXX

PETER DAVIES was with Mortimer Gordon two hours after receiving his message, and found him much agitated and strangely irritable. His last illness had visibly shaken him. The dogged resolution which enabled the old man, when he thought it necessary, to restrain his temper, had changed for a nervous excitability, foreign to his temperament. It seemed that some spring had snapped, arresting the normal working of the mental machinery.

"He'll want careful handling," Davies reflected.

"Well, squire,"—Davies addressed his client thus when most anxious to keep him in a good temper,—  
"what's up now? You look pretty fit for an 'old un.'"

Mortimer rose from his chair and shuffled round the room in his slippers, as he answered :

"What's up! Why the deuce an' all! My son's gone away to play golf with Locksley, he says, but I believe he's running after that Drayton woman, an' I'm d——d if I stand it."

"Then tell him so, old chap!" said Davies genially.  
"Nothing like speaking your mind!"

"How the devil can I, Peter Davies, before I  
I'm sure? It's what I want you to find out."

ain't goin' to have a row with Phil without good cause."

And the irritable old fellow kicked across the room the footstall over which he stumbled. His manner was so odd that Davies doubted whether he should tell him what he knew.

He first made an effort to soothe him.

"Now, look here, Mortimer! Don't run round the room like a bear in a cage, but sit down and think the matter over quietly. Men like you, who've had things all their own way, never can quarrel reasonably with their sons. Phil's all right."

Gordon sat down.

"How d'you mean, all right?" he snapped.

"You know what I mean, squire. Suppose he did run after this lady, who is badly in need of comfort, it strikes me; what then?"

"'Pon my word, Peter! I should a thought you had more sense."

"Without claiming a surplus of it, Mortimer, I fancy I'm as sharp as most of 'em!"

"D'you mean to tell me, Davies, if Phil runs after this Drayton-Madryn woman, or whatever she calls herself, that it don't mean business?"

"Depends what you mean by business, Mortimer."

"Marriage, of course!"

"Marriage is pretty optional, I take it," replied the judicious Davies.

"Do yer?" said Mortimer rudely. "Well it ain't



with Phil. And she'll jump at him fast enough now she's been chucked into the gutter."

"Not without the money, Mortimer. Remember how she's been accustomed to live."

"Well if he means marrying her, it's devil a penny of my money he ever gits. I'd sooner leave it to some d——d, silly charity!"

This unrighteous threat dismayed Davies.

"Not you, Mortimer," he said encouragingly. "In any case you'd find something better than that for it. But it's no good looking so far ahead. With your constitootion you'll outlive the lot of us."

The old man looked keenly at the lawyer, whose face bore no more expression than an intelligent slate; and since most of us believe what we want, Gordon mentally accepted the other's view as not unlikely.

Davies saw his advantage, and resumed:

"As you said the other day, squire, you've the whip hand of 'em, at all events."

"So I have," replied Mortimer. "Maybe it is too soon to talk o' the money; but the question is,—is he running after her? That's what I want to know."

"I happen to know," said Davies quietly, "that he was expected at 'The Cottage' to-day."

The old man broke in with his worst oath.

"He and Locksley are staying at the hotel—there *is* golf there, Mortimer. Mrs. D's. nurse writes to that chap—the valet, you know. He'll

keep us posted. At any rate we shall have a notion what's going on. So far it means nothing. Mrs. Stewart—Lady Belchester's sister, you know, who married the meat-extract man—is there too. Locksley's suppose to admire her. So after all it may be the other man's game that Phil's playing, for Mrs. S. by all accounts, is a pretty lively piece o' goods, and her husband isn't in what you'd call his first youth."

"He's a younger man than me," said Mortimer.

"Maybe," said Davies, "but he hasn't anything like your stamina."

"If I on'y thought it was a little game o' that sort I'd wish 'em both luck," said the old man; "but I ain't easy in my mind. I can't trust that Madryn lot."

"I shall be able to let you know what it does mean this time to-morrow. The nurse'll see to that. If it means anything you can just let Phil know what you think."

After this conversation which, in consequence of old Gordon's peculiar mood, pursued a circular and blasphemous course, reverting to the same points and the same threats, Davies departed, leaving his client still greatly perturbed and suffering from what he vaguely described as an infernal swimming of the head.

It seemed to him that his son was abusing his generosity. "He daren't tell me where he was going," he reminded himself. The doubt stretched

itself out in his mind to full length. "He keeps it dark," he reflected, "because he thinks I'm going to die, and then he'll have his 'look in'!" Now Phil was a deuced clever chap who never came to conclusions without good reason. Perhaps the doctors had told him that he, Mortimer, wouldn't last long. And, then, becoming conscious of decreasing vigour, the dread of death, which the quick sympathy of his son had dispelled, fell on him again. His son might be managing him as he had seen other sons humbug their fathers.

These melancholy thoughts haunted him till the evening. The house was a solitude, the dark corners full of menace. The pale twilight in the fireless rooms "gave him the creeps." The dinner hour came, but brought no appetite. But if he could not eat he drank recklessly. At nine, still in his slippers, he stumbled up to bed. By ten his noisy breathing was the only sound in the silence of the landing on which his room opened.

When Green looked in and saw the mottled face, he shook his head.

"He'll be in a pretty state to-morrow," he said to the maids, still cheerfully supping in that undisciplined house.

"You shouldn't let him drink. Mr. Philip never does," said they.

But when all the house was still and the square silent, save for the rumble of market carts in the great main thoroughfare, rolling sullenly eastward,

old Gordon awoke from his nightmares. He had dreamt that he was dead and shut tight in a coffin, and that Philip, who alone knew, refused to let him out. He half believed in dreams. What did this portend. The blood was humming in his ears. It was, he thought, the murmur of time passing. When he was a child some old woman had told him that after midnight it became audible. He had often listened to its flight before, but it had never passed so swiftly. It seemed hurrying somewhere. On his mantelpiece was a bottle of medicine, prescribed during his late illness, and still unfinished. "Physic" for Mortimer Gordon was "physic," and the more it cost the better he thought it. He decided to have a dose. Then, after some groping, he switched on the electric light, stumbled out of bed, finding comfort in the brightness, and, with shaking hand, poured the medicine into a graduated glass.

As he swallowed it with difficulty he caught a glimpse of his face in the mirror.

"You're a d——d bad colour Mortimer, my boy," he said to his reflection, with a stupid leer.

His ideas were not clear, the vague fear harassed him, and when he awoke from his troubled sleep, as he did several times before dawn, death was the first thought that rushed on his mind.

The next morning, though the giddiness still worried him and he was threatened with a nausea that perplexed him, he refused to see the doctor as his man proposed, and insisted on getting up to breakfast.

"Dreamt I was in a cawfin last night, Green," he said; "bed's a bit too near that to be pleasant."

All the morning he sat trying to read the papers, but unable to fix his attention, expecting news of his son, and feeling very lonely. He had got rid of Mrs. Fortescue to please Phil; but now the fellow had left him to run after that confounded "divorcy" woman!

The grievance shaped itself and his resentment grew. At twelve o'clock Green brought him beef tea, and wanted the orders for the coachman.

Driving exercise had lately been ordered him by the doctors, but since Mrs. Fortescue's departure he had scarcely used his carriage. He thought ill of men seen in anything but smart sporting carts unless in the company of "a well-dressed woman." To sit beside him in the victoria in her best clothes was one of his late housekeeper's most attractive duties.

"What's the good o' drivin'," grumbled the old man to Green, "when there ain't no one to drive with?"

The valet looked out on the sunshine, and then at the old man. "For all his money," he thought, "he isn't so very happy!"

"It's a very fine day, sir," he said, "and a drive would do you good."

"Tell him the victoria at three then!"

"It'll be a blasted bath-chair next," he thought contemptuously. "Phil oughtn't to leave me. 'Why! I'd a married again if it hadn't been for him.'"

This set his thoughts moving in other directions. He reckoned up the number of women whom he might have married. They were "such a nice lot." This gratified his vanity, and finally led him to reconsider his own appearance and the loud check suit put on because its boisterous assertiveness seemed as remote as possible from the idea of coffins.

Hang it! Why not walk his shakiness off? With the aid of Green he put on a black coat big, patent leather boots and his shiny hat, and walked out into the square.

The day was fine. Showers had fallen in the early morning. The smell of grass and flowers was in the air. The odour of the turf brought back to his mind race meetings on Epsom, Lewes, Brighton downs, and all the vigorous, noisy life which lay dreamlike behind him, in unremembered sunshine.

Spring was renewing all life but his. He was nearly seventy and ashamed of his age.

He walked round the square, and glanced up at the Madryn's house which was closed. "Still funk-ing it, d——d 'em," he said to himself. Suddenly at the other gate he saw "Old Mother Parkington," as he called her, although fifteen years her senior. He felt she would insist on speaking to him. Although she "got on her high horse over Mrs. Fortescue," now that his son had returned she had inquired constantly concerning his health.

He wasn't going to speak to the old woman! To

avoid it he left by the nearest gate and entered his own house where a telegram was handed him.

Old Gordon took it to the study, sat down heavily, and read: "Phil means business. Wire him, Cottage, Fisherspoint, to come back at once.—Davies."

## CHAPTER XXXI

WHEN Mrs. Stewart met Philip Gordon and Mrs. Drayton at lunch, she guessed that a complete understanding prevailed between them. Two hours earlier, when the unconfessed lovers appeared on the beach, Frankie's nurse had come to the same conclusion.

Of this interview, whilst Frankie was taking his tea, nurse wrote an account to her "friend" the valet, to whom, in her own mind, she considered that she was engaged, although the gentleman held more elastic views of their relationship.

"She brought him down to the sands where Frankie and me were playing," wrote nurse. "He looked at the boy ; then he looked at her, and said : ' He grows more and more like you ! ' Then she looked at him, in a funny way out of the corners of her eyes, —but, oh, so pleased !—and laughed quite happy. ' Your hair,' said he, ' was just that colour when I first saw it shining above the garden wall.' ' Doesn't it still shine,' says she, ' Shine, yes, why like a saints glory ! ' says he, just as though I was miles away,—people are like that with nurses, you know,—' but,' he went on, ' he is all your boy.' Of course I kept a perfectly straight face, although I knew what was



going on as well as though they'd told me. She seemed quite changed—all bright and happy. If she'd been more like that to the other one, who knows whether they mightn't have got on?

"Well! after playing with Frankie a bit, they walked off along the shore with their shoulders almost touching, just like yours and mine might, quite peaceful and happy. After dinner I talked it over with Mrs. Stewart's maid. 'They'll be married as soon as they decently can,' says she. 'That's what Mrs. S. sent for him for!' Then I said it was time the poor thing had some sort of consolation. 'That young Gordon,' I said, 'will make up for it to her, if any one can. He's a different sort from the last,' I said, thinking of Mr. D., 'and not always running after other women,' I said.

"The things all over the house already,—Mrs. Stewart's maid is a good one to talk!—but, although they mean to keep it as dark as they can, naturally, (not being out of the Divorce Court making it most shocking!) you may take it from me as a fact, that she means to marry young Gordon. He's been faithful to her for years; and if some other nice men I know would only take pattern by him——" But here the writer, becoming absorbed in the subject of her own entangled affections, ceased to throw light on those of her employer.

The day after this letter was written Peter Davies became acquainted with its contents, and, tempted

to try an experiment, sent the telegram to Mortimer Gordon.

The message reached the old man almost simultaneously with a warning coming from a more mysterious power.

"After he got that telegram," Green related afterwards, "the master was never the same. He called me, and said, 'Send this wire to Mr. Phil.' But when I came back he was sitting in his chair with a sort of grin, and his mouth twisted right across his face."

But the menacing finger lifted. Suddenly, even as the man watched, the attack which had flickered, like a devil's flame in his master's face, disappeared. The twisted mouth muscles relaxed, and, but for a droop in the lid of the left eye, the light stroke left no evidence of its fall.

"What are you looking at?" said Gordon huskily.

"Thought you didn't seem quite the thing," replied Green.

A little later Mortimer came into lunch and tried to eat. He had no appetite, and swallowed with difficulty, but he drank a pint of champagne and smoked a cigar.

When the carriage came, however, he denied angrily that he had ordered it, and on Green meekly expostulating, swore savagely.

"D'yer mean to tell me I'm dotty?" he roared. "I'll be master in my own house, Green, and I'll just let Mr. Phil know it too. Tell Hicks I never ordered him, and to go to blazes."

He swore at Green to reassure himself, for he felt as one living behind a menacing haze, out of which it seemed that a fell, cold hand had lately clutched at him. A sense of obstruction surrounded him, indefinable, nameless, almost palpable, obscuring his memory, destroying its perspective, obliterating space and time. When he had scribbled the telegram—and a telegram was his customary form of communication—he forgot his son's name, until he remembered that it was his own.

But here another misty difficulty arose. If his son's name was Gordon, his seemed to be Harris—Alf Harris. Through this confusion his resentment against the Madryn's penetrated; and he then remembered why he was ordering his son's return. It was to tell him that he would be cut off his will if he married the "divorcy." He repeated his variant of the word several times to test the clearness of his mind. Here was a fact to which he could pin his thoughts. Whilst all other impressions and memories were indistinct, this purpose stood out clearly as a gas-lamp in a fog.

The valet, suspecting the sinister change, hung about the door listening.

Once he looked in with a circular on a tray which the old man took mechanically, but never opened.

"He isn't quite clear in his head," said Green.

"Send for the doctor," said Cook.

"I daren't," said Green.

A little later he entered the room again, under pretence of closing a window.

This time the old man looked up, and said :

"If any one calls, Green, I'm out."

"Yes, sir. But suppose it's Mr. Davies? You might like to see him, sir."

Mortimer reflected a moment, then replied :

"He's not wanted to-day, dessay he will be to-morrow. Depends on Mr. Phil."

Mortimer Gordon rose from his chair, walked to the door, and asked :

"When did you say Mr. Phil would be here?"

Green, who had said nothing on the subject, but who had looked out the trains, answered :

"Not before 11.30, if he starts at once, sir."

The old man slowly took in the information, and then walked upstairs, his smart coat of youthful cut, and shining patent-leather boots presenting a melancholy contrast to the ominous numbness dogging his steps. Green watched him.

"Poor old chap," he thought.

He heard his master's door close, then sat down in the armchair to read the papers, wondering, in the event of anything going wrong, whether Mr. Phil would "keep him on."

He sat and read for half an hour, then, glancing over the paper into the street, saw Mr. Davies mounting the steps. He had read the telegram and expected the visit.

The bell rang. Green opened the door.

"Master in, Green?" said Davies.

"Yes, sir; but he won't see anybody."

"He'll see me. Tell him I'm here."

Mr. Davies stepped into the hall.

"I asked him about you, sir, and he said he shouldn't want to trouble you to-day but might to-morrow, after he'd seen Mr. Phil."

"Ah!" said Davies thoughtfully.

"The master's very odd, sir," resumed Green, "not himself at all, but dazed like."

"Took a little something that didn't agree with him last night, eh, Green?"

"'Fraid he did, sir. Talked about coffins and things when I went to get him up. Then he sent me with a wire to Mr. Phil, telling him to come back; and just before lunch his face got quite drawn across."

"Paralysed?"

"Don't know, I'm sure; but when that passed off he quite forgot he'd ordered the carriage, and swore at me when I said he had."

Davies now regretted the telegram.

"Tell him I must see him on business," he said. "At any rate he mustn't be left in his room alone."

The lawyer walked into the study, the valet mounted the stairs, and entered the big bedroom.

Mortimer was seated by the window, his eyes fixed across the square on the Madryns house which, by some inexplicable mental process, enabled him to focus his thoughts. Hate rallied his fading intellect.

"Mr. Davies wishes to see you on particular business, sir," said Green smoothly.

The old man answered rudely, but without taking his eyes from their object :

"If he likes to come upstairs, he can."

The man disappeared, and in a moment the lawyer entered.

"Hullo, old boy!" said he in his heartiest manner.

"Hullo!" said Mortimer, still without turning his gaze from the window ; "what do you want? You've had my message."

Davies stood and scanned the other's face. The Madryns' shuttered windows for the moment had dispelled the old man's expressions of gathering vacancy.

"I only wanted to say Phil'll be home to-night, squire, or early to-morrow, and to ask you to treat my wire as 'private,' d'you see?"

"All right. Is that all?"

"Well, I hope you won't be hard on the young chap. Remember what you were with the petticoats at his age, squire!"

"I was a bit of a dawg, perhaps, but I never wanted to marry a 'divorcy' like him. There's the Madryns' house across the square,—look at it,—blinds all down, doors an' windows achin' for paint! The gallant colonel couldn't stand the scandal, but bolted from it like a hare. Now, look here, Peter, I've a bit of a head on me an' want to be quiet. Jus' you

leave me and come round to-morrow and I'll let you know how the thing's panned out."

"All right, squire. I'll look in."

The flash of vigour deceived Davies.

"He'll be all right, Green," he said, "if you keep him off the liquor."

And Green believed him ; and so they left the old man alone in his room to meet the strong foe.

Meanwhile the telegram had reached Philip Gordon at lunch time. He had spent all the morning boating, in the calm bay, alone with Constance Drayton, for Mrs. Stewart had decided Locksley must go round the links with her, as the serious critic of her swing and style.

The morning appeared to Philip the happiest that he had ever spent. He had rowed across to the other headland where they had landed, and wandered among the rocks as naturally as they had played together among the ruins on the island in the Swiss lake long ago.

"We only want the lizards!" he had said.

"And our innocent hearts!" she replied.

He saw the tears swimming in her eyes, and then—he never knew how—for the first time in her life she was in his arms, her cheek against his, her tears on his face.

They were among the rocks, the green seaweed, and the lapping tide ; to the south the green-grey sea, behind, solitude and granite cliffs—lovers at last defying past and future in the deep joy of the present.

But reality strode to them like a giant from the horizon. Suddenly she remembered that she was not free, and shrank away, and then they faced facts and built up a scheme of life from the fabric of their reconstructed happiness.

Later they rowed back with the tide and mounted the winding path to the happy garden and sloping lawns, and there Gordon received his father's message.

"Come home at once.—Mortimer Gordon."

The son reflected a moment. Probably his father was ill. In any case he would obey.

There was a train at three o'clock.

Swiftly his mind was made up.

"When shall I see you again?" he asked.

"Not till I am free, Philip."

His name pronounced by her voice thrilled him. He stood wondering in the garden scents and sounds, hearing the ever thrilling larks on the encircling hills and the rapturous thrushes.

Then they hurried to the house, where Constance helped him in his retreat.

But Mrs. Stewart took him aside.

"Have you two made it up?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Ah!" she said, with a sigh of relief. "Now you may be off as soon as you like and I shall die a happy matchmaker."

• • • • •

It was midnight when Philip reached home—and



found the house hushed with the stillness of a mysterious change.

As the cab rolled up, Green, who had been listening for it, opened the door gently with solemn face. It was four hours too late. The young man went up to his father's room lighted by a shaded electric lamp. There, in his clothes, on his bed, covered with a sheet, with the shining patent-leather boots on his feet, was stretched the old bookmaker.

The last glimpse of life had been Colonel Madryn's melancholy windows.

Suddenly, as he had turned, the suspended stroke fell and slew him. When the servants, startled by the heavy fall, rushed to his room, he had ceased to breathe.

His son replaced the sheet, and, as he moved quietly from the room, felt, even against his will, that he was moving to a happier life.

Even the least selfish may bear a cheerful torch at the funeral of the unrighteous.

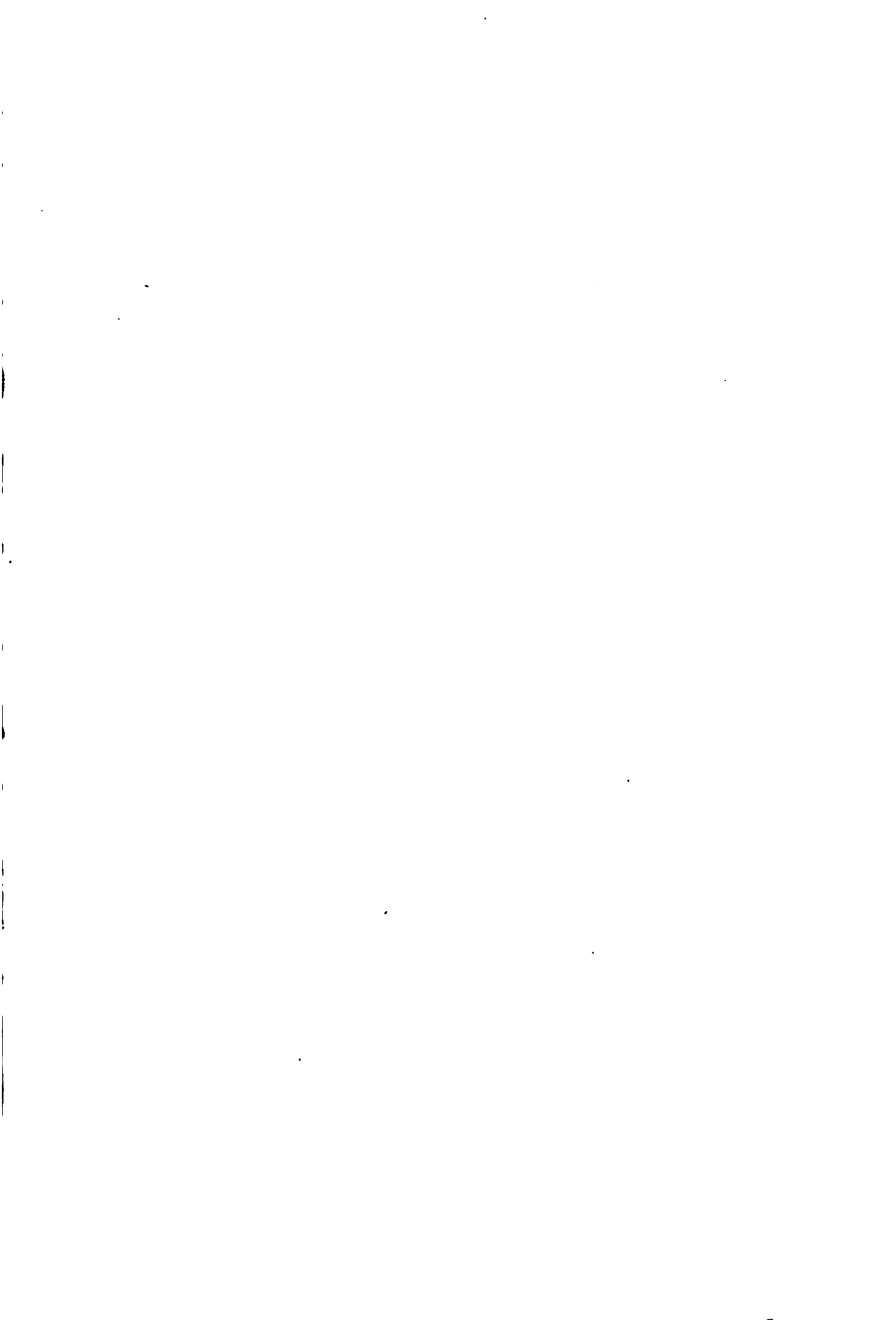
Few lives were less necessary to the world than that of Mortimer Gordon, whom death approached through the mist.

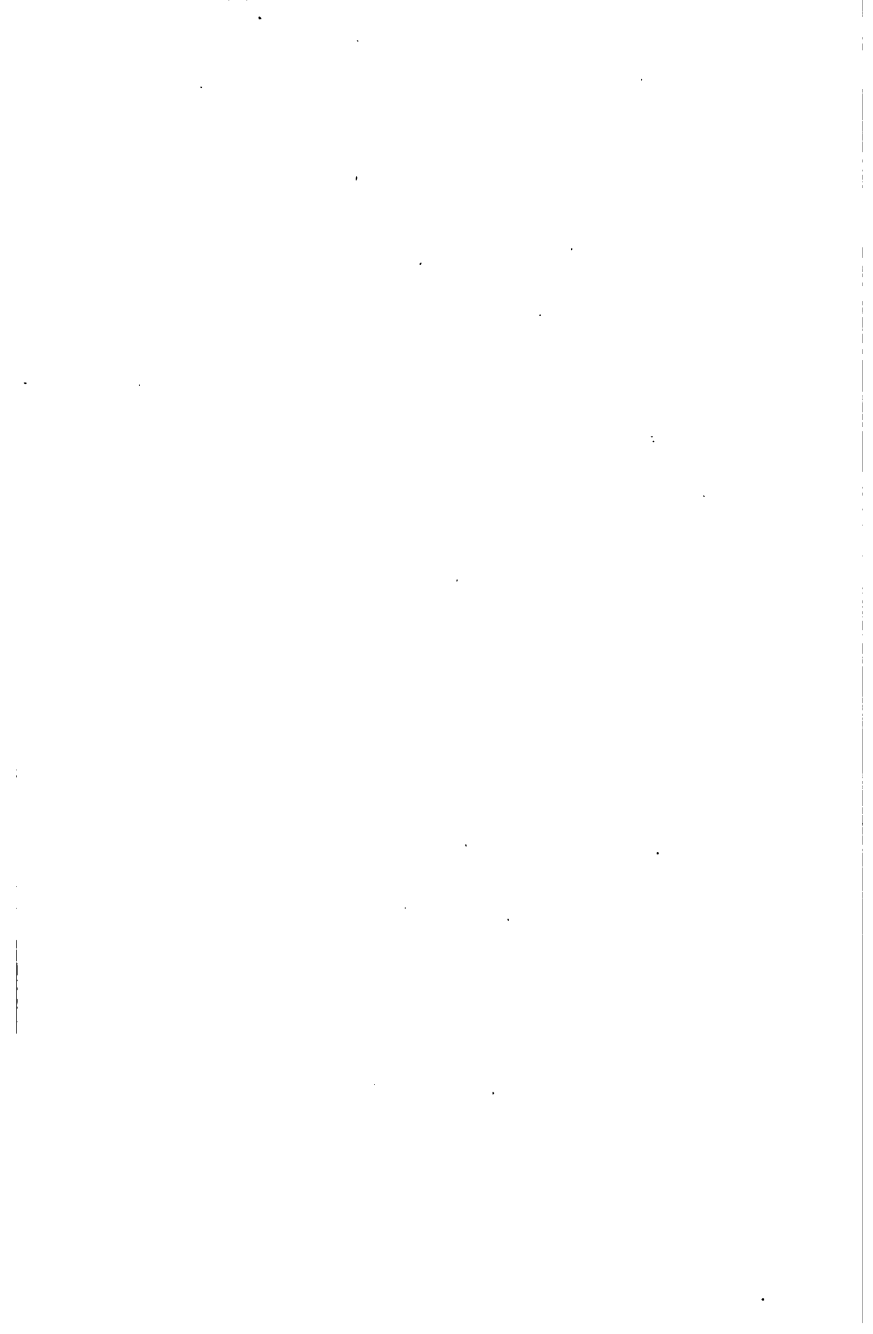
When his friends, with the sense that everybody else must die, had said, "poor old chap!" pity was exhausted. But over his will they chuckled respectfully.

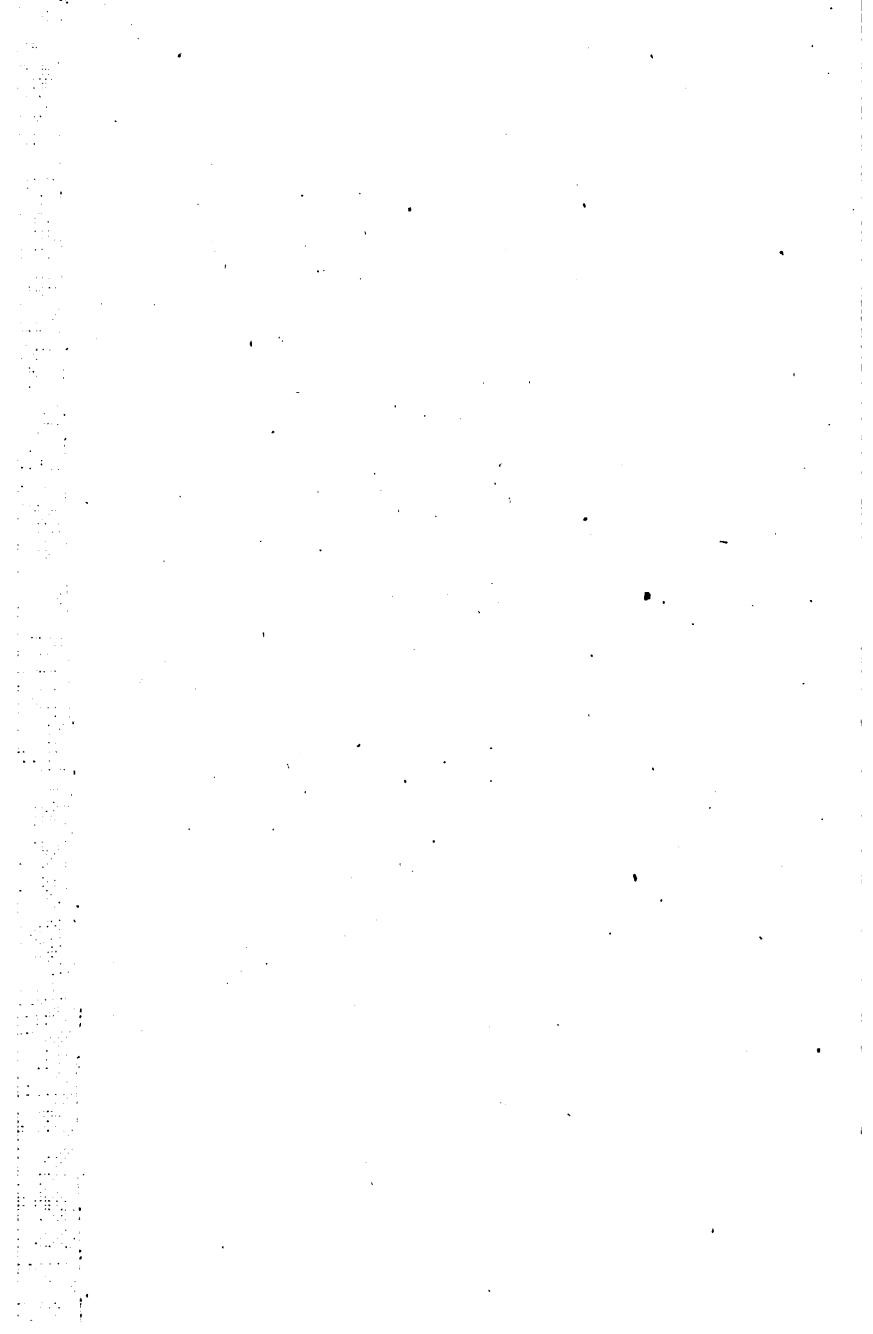
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